

# BEYOND PHILOLOGY

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF LINGUISTICS, LITERARY STUDIES  
AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

14/2

Edited by Maria Fengler

WYDAWNICTWO UNIWERSYTETU GDANSKIEGO  
GDAŃSK 2017

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Danuta Stanulewicz

**SECTION EDITORS**

Olga Sokołowska (Linguistics)

Ludmiła Gruszecka-Blaim (Literary Studies, Culture)

Wojciech Kubiński (Translation)

Tadeusz Danilewicz (Language Acquisition, Education)

Jadwiga Wegrodzka (Reviews, Reports, Interviews)

**ASSISTANT EDITORS**

Maria Fengler

Michał Golubiewski

Ewelina Gutowska-Kozielska

Karolina Janczukowicz

Joanna Redzimska

Małgorzata Smentek

Magdalena Wawrzyniak-Śliwska

**PROOFREADERS**

Martin Blaszk

Sarah Flamminio

Robert Urbański

Jean Ward

Tadeusz Z. Wolański

The Editors and Proofreaders are all affiliated with the Institute of English and American Studies, University of Gdańsk, Poland.

**COVER DESIGN**

Andrzej Taranek

**ISSN 1732-1220**

**eISSN 2451-1498**

© Copyright by Uniwersytet Gdańskie

Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego

**Contact address**

Institute of English and American Studies

University of Gdańsk

Wita Stwosza 51

80-308 Gdańsk

Poland

Phone: (+48) 58 523 30 49, (+48) 58 523 30 50

Email: beyond.philology@ug.edu.pl

## **ASSOCIATE EDITORIAL BOARD**

Marta Bogdanowicz (University of Gdańsk, Poland)  
Joanna Burzyńska-Sylwestrzak (Uczelnia Lingwistyczno-Techniczna, Świecie, Poland)  
Ewa Dąbrowska (Northumbria University, Newcastle, U.K.)  
Desmond Graham (University of Newcastle, U.K.)  
Zoltán Kövecses (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary)  
Ronald W. Langacker (University of California at San Diego, U.S.A.)  
Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (University of Łódź, Poland)  
Jerzy Limon (University of Gdańsk, Poland)  
Irene Gilsenan Nordin (Dalarna University, Falun, Sweden)  
David Malcolm (University of Gdańsk, Poland)  
Elżbieta H. Oleksy (University of Łódź, Poland)  
Adam Pasicki (Pedagogical University of Kraków, Poland)  
Piotr Ruszkiewicz (Pedagogical University of Kraków, Poland)  
Bogdan Szymanek (Catholic University of Lublin, Poland)  
Ryszard Wenzel (Akademia Polonijna, Częstochowa, Poland)  
Marta Wiszniewska (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland)

## **BOARD OF REVIEWERS**

Frank Cioffi (Baruch College, City University of New York, U.S.A.)  
Danuta Gabryś-Barker (University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland)  
Aleksandra Kędzierska (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland)  
Elżbieta Mańczak-Wohlfeld (Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland)  
Marzenna Mioduszewska (Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid, Spain)  
Grzegorz Moroz (University of Białystok, Poland)  
Kazimierz Sroka (University of Gdańsk, Poland; Polonia University in Częstochowa, Poland)  
Krystyna Stamirowska (Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland)  
Yuri Stulov (Minsk State Linguistic University, Belarus)  
Kamila Turewicz (University of Humanities and Economics in Łódź, Poland)  
Tomasz Warchoł (Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, U.S.A.)

---

*Beyond Philology* is published in print and online:  
<[http://www.fil.ug.gda.pl/pl/instytutu--anglistyki\\_i\\_amerykanistyki--beyond\\_philology/](http://www.fil.ug.gda.pl/pl/instytutu--anglistyki_i_amerykanistyki--beyond_philology/)>, <<http://cwf.ug.edu.pl/ojs/index.php/beyond>>. The online version is primary.

*Beyond Philology* is indexed by

- The Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (CEJSH) (<<http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl>>)
- Index Copernicus (<<http://www.indexcopernicus.com>>)
- MLA International Bibliography



## **BEYOND PHILOLOGY 14/2**

### **Contents**

#### LITERARY STUDIES

Bergson – Beckett – Lotman: A semiotic analysis of Samuel Beckett's “A Wet Night” from <i>More Pricks Than Kicks</i> RAFAŁ BORKOWSKI	9
Biblical and psychoanalytic allegory in Jane White's <i>Quarry</i> KAROL CHOJNOWSKI	31
Female verticality, male horizontality: On genderized spaces and unequal border crossings in the prose of Kate Chopin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman MONIKA DACA	55
The significance of the frontier in the evolution of the Western genre ANNA DULSKA	69
“From jubilation to despair”: Representations of drink in British and Irish literature WOJCIECH KLEPUSZEWSKI	85
Voiceing the Maori issue: Patricia Grace's <i>Small Holes in the Silence: Short Stories</i> EWA KROPLEWSKA	103

- Between lawfulness and lawlessness:  
The conceptual boundary between the system  
and the individual in Richard Wright's *Native Son* 121  
JUSTYNA STIEPANOW

## CULTURE

- At the interplace:  
*Giant*, Tino Villanueva  
and America's promise of diversity 141  
GRZEGORZ WELIZAROWICZ

## REPORTS

- DRAFF conference (5–6 August 2016)  
and Samuel Beckett Summer School  
(7–12 August 2016), Trinity College Dublin 161  
ALEKSANDRA WACHACZ

- Information for Contributors 167

## LITERARY STUDIES



**Bergson – Beckett – Lotman:  
A semiotic analysis of Samuel Beckett’s  
“A Wet Night” from *More Pricks Than Kicks***

RAFAŁ BORKOWSKI

*Received 25.11.2016,  
received in revised form 15.10.2017,  
accepted 9.11.2017.*

**Abstract**

The article presents a semiotic analysis of a short story entitled “A Wet Night” from Samuel Beckett’s collection *More Pricks Than Kicks*. The author attempts to analyse the story using the semiotic tools and the concept of semiosphere proposed by Yuri Lotman. In addition to Lotman’s theory, the discussion refers to traces of Henri Bergson’s philosophy, correlated with Beckett’s interests in this matter and highlighted in “A Wet Night”. The aim is to show that both Lotman’s and Bergson’s theories find their application in the selected story.

**Key words**

asymmetry, Beckett, memory, semiosphere, semiotics, space, time

**Bergson – Beckett – Lotman:  
semiotyczna analiza opowiadania Samuela Becketta  
*A Wet Night* z tomu *More Pricks than Kicks***

**Abstrakt**

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza semiotyczna opowiadania „A Wet Night” autorstwa Samuela Becketta, które można znaleźć w zbiorze *More Pricks Than Kicks*. Autor artykułu podejmuje próbę analizy semiotycznej wyżej wymienionego opowiadania, opierając się na koncepcji semiotyka Jurija Lotmana, który zaproponował teorię semiosfery oraz systemów modelujących. Ponadto autor zestawia koncepcję Lotmana z filozofią Henri Bergsona, której echa przejawiają się w opowiadaniu „A Wet Night”, w celu sprawdzenia, czy obie teorie znajdują zastosowania w analizowanym tekście.

**Słowa kluczowe**

asymetria, Beckett, czas, pamięć, przestrzeń, semiosfera, semiotyka

In his 1929 essay entitled “Dante... Bruno... Vico... Joyce”, Samuel Beckett writes as follows: “And now here am I, with my handful of abstractions, among which notably: a mountain, the coincidence of contraries, the inevitability of cyclic evolution, a system of poetics, and the prospect of self-extension in the world of Mr. Joyce’s *Work in Progress*” (2010b: 495). The fragment neatly encapsulates the thoughts which occupied the mind of the then 23-year-old artist. Suffice it to say that Beckett’s pre-war works can be described, quoting the author himself, as “a synthetical syrup” (2010b: 505). Indeed, the author’s early novels and short stories resemble a melting pot of ideas, concepts and thoughts which were to be developed in the course of his artistic career and, eventually, flourished in his late works, creating the so-called *signature* of Samuel Beckett.

To my mind, the short story collection entitled *More Pricks Than Kicks* is an accumulation of artistic experiments and thought processes of the young author in their embryonic

form. Written between 1931 and 1933, and eventually published in 1934, the collection hybridises the areas of literature, art and philosophy which in that period particularly fascinated Beckett. In *More Pricks* one can find traces of Beckett's spiritual mentors, especially Dante, Joyce, Vico, Descartes, and Bergson; a play with literary conventions such as psychological and philosophical story, eclogue, satire, classical tragedy, Bildungs- and Künstlerroman, internal monologue and the stream of consciousness. Moreover, *More Pricks* includes elements of intertextuality, on the one hand, and autobiographical motifs on the other. In addition, the collection is filled with sounds, both of classical composers, like Beethoven or Mozart, and of traditional Irish folk songs, the clatter of the streets of Dublin, the sounds of nature, intermingled with the uncouth hubbubs of burps and flatuses. The cacophony of sounds eventually leads to pauses of silence, which become all the more resounding.

A variety of motifs and concepts borrowed or taken from other pieces of art allowed Beckett to create in *More Pricks Than Kicks* a unique world, or a semiosphere, which reflects the young writer's artistic interests. The present article concentrates upon the short story entitled "A Wet Night" from *More Pricks*, predominantly because it combines two significant subjects of young Beckett's interests, namely the philosophy of Henri Bergson and his fascination with Italian literature, especially with Dante's *Divine Comedy*. I will be particularly interested in such theories as the semiosphere, the relation between text and non-text, the asymmetry and importance of a code proposed by Lotman on the one hand, and the relation between mind and body proposed by Bergson on the other.

In *Culture and Explosion*, Yuri Lotman proposes to redefine Roman Jakobson's long-established communication model, namely addresser–language (text)–addressee as addresser–code (text)–addressee. Lotman introduces an important distinction between code and language, suggesting that code is an

artificial structure, whereas language “is a code plus its history” (2009: x). Moreover, he claims that “[t]he term ‘code’ carries with it the idea of an artificial, newly created structure, introduced by instantaneous agreement. A code does not imply history, that is, psychologically it orients us towards artificial language, which is also, in general, assumed to be an ideal model of language” (2009: 4). The statement can be understood as follows: despite its appeal for many linguists, the ideal act of communication between a model addresser and a model addressee, who fully understands the addresser’s message, seems to be pointless, as such communication is insipid and leads nowhere. Instead, Lotman argues that there must be a form of tension and resistance between an addresser and an addressee which makes it possible to create a new space of communication. This, in turn, becomes the essence of a conversation. Such action lies at the origin of the concept of *semiosphere*, where an addressee, a message and an addresser become a coherent system. The term semiosphere, coined by Lotman in 1982, was patterned on Vladimir Vernadsky’s biosphere, a closed, self-regulating system containing ecosystems (1990: 123). According to Lotman, a semiosphere is “[t]he semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages” (1990: 123).

The question of the interrelation between a code and a language needs to be addressed here. In Lotmanian categories, a code is a pure message without any background, such as for instance history or culture, whereas a language conveys these concepts within the “semiotic spaces and their boundaries” (1990: 124). Moreover, the notions of code and language may be interpreted in the categories of not only literature, but art as well. Consequently, language does not have to be solely interpreted in the categories of grammar, syntax or spelling, but in the categories of literature, music and film as well. Thus the semiosphere resembles an organism which in its core is built of a natural language which further allows the semiosphere to create a variety of new languages, like artistic, poetic or reli-

gious ones. These languages, or codes, were defined by Lotman as *secondary modelling systems*, and according to his theory, an infinite number of such codes can be created within a semiosphere (1990: x).

Another notion which Lotman's theory introduces is that of the *boundary*. The boundary separates a semiosphere from a non-semiotic space, or a text from a non-text. Intriguingly, a non-text can enter into a semiosphere but it is automatically forced to adjust to the rules of that particular semiosphere. However, it may sometimes happen that frictions, or *explosions* occur between different concepts within a semiosphere. According to Lotman, every explosion eventually leads to the emergence of new phenomena, thus the processes within a semiosphere undergo continuous change. One more aspect which characterises the Lotmanian semiosphere is the concept of time. Time within the borders of a semiosphere is non-linear and multi-dimensional. Thus the process of semiosis involves different dimensions of time, e.g. cultural, historical or political.

Having introduced the basic notions of Lotman's theory, the subsequent point is to find out whether it can be used in practice. Beckett's "A Wet Night" begins with the haunting word "hark" (2010b: 108). It is an old-fashioned word which stands for "listening attentively" and is often used in the imperative form. The word connotes several possible interpretations. Read in Lotman's semiotic categories, it becomes a starting point for the story, "the frame" (Lotman 1977: 209), or the border, which separates the non-text from the semiosphere of the work of art. Moreover, the word "hark" comes to be recognised in the categories of a semiological language upon which the secondary modelling systems, or in other words the messages, are super-structured. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing", a famous carol by Charles Wesley, can serve as an example of a non-text transmitted through the "border". Written in 1739, the song may evoke positive connotations with Christmas time, which is the background of "A Wet Night".

The reference to music and sounds is not coincidental in this fragment. The word “hark” not only attracts the reader’s attention, but may also be considered as the starting point of the “existence” of the text. If we assume a retrospective view of Beckett’s mature writing, we can notice the similarities with such works as *Breath* (1969), *Not I* (1972), *Company* (1980), and *Worstward Ho* (1983). Intriguingly, it seems that every protagonist of the above-mentioned works starts to develop his, her or its self-awareness through sound. In the case of *Company* it is “[a] voice [which] comes to one in the dark” (2010b: 427), in *Worstward Ho* “On. Say on. Be said on” (2010b: 471). A sound of inhaling air symbolising the dawn of a new life can be traced in *Breath*. The opening sentence of “A Wet Night” refers to sound as well. It is worth evoking here the concept of *incipit*, borrowed by literary theory from medieval manuscripts. In the Middle Ages, an incipit was an initial sequence of signs which started a text; in other words, it was the first sentence of a story whose aim was to indicate the beginning of a work of art. Literary theory equips this notion with additional features; the incipit’s aim is to engage the readers and inform them about the world of a novel, answering three basic questions: “who?”, “where?” and “when?” As far as classical novels are concerned, in the majority of cases it would not be difficult to answer these questions, but in the case of Beckett’s incipits the answer would be more challenging. The word “hark” does not describe any circumstances of the story, it rather functions as if it were an ornament which decorates the beginning or an incipit of a medieval Irish volume. According to Del Lungo, there are two major ways of entering into a narrative: either in “I) *medias res*” or “II) progressively, deferring the action to the heart of the story” (qtd. in Adamo 2000: 59). In addition, Del Lungo proposes additional sub-categories of the incipit, namely static, progressive, dynamic, and suspended. The last one is based on the “rarefaction of information and delayed dramatization” (Adamo 2000: 59), which in the case of the word “hark” seems to be the most relevant.

The story's incipit may also be interpreted in the categories of Christianity, namely the birth of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Reading further the first passage of the story, one may observe that the early imperative tenor is smoothly transformed into a monologue addressed to an unknown person: "Hark, it is the season of festivity and goodwill. Shopping is in full swing, the streets are thronged with revellers, the Corporation has offered a prize for the best-dressed window, Hyam's trousers are down again" (2010b: 108). The opposition of the high- and lowbrow themes presented in this fragment automatically creates, according to Lotman's theory, possible new messages based upon, deceptively, the same code. The structure of the semiosphere begins to work on several different levels simultaneously and the inner oppositions (high-lowbrow subjects) structure the text and make it more cohesive. Among oppositional pairs one can find, for instance, silence-sound, seriousness-irony or spirituality-reality.

When we take a closer look at the end of "A Wet Night", a certain kind of frame can also be noticed. As in *Breath*, where the play begins and ends with the sound of inhaling and exhaling air, eventually leading to silence, a similar compositional principle is used in the story under discussion. The final passage introduces once again "a voice, slightly more in sorrow than in anger this time", a voice that "enjoined him to move on, which, the pain being so much better, he was only too happy to do" (2010b: 138). What deserves particular attention is the word "enjoin", meaning "order or strongly advise somebody to do something" (Oxford Dictionary). The pair hark-enjoin thus becomes the *limes*, the frame of the story.

In *Universe of the Mind*, Lotman introduces another crucial feature of each semiosphere, namely its asymmetry:

The structure of the semiosphere is asymmetrical. Asymmetry finds expression in the currents of internal translations with

<sup>1</sup> The topic of Christianity in Samuel Beckett's works has been discussed in detail, for instance by Erik Tonning in his *Modernism and Christianity* (2014) and by Chris Ackerley (2013).

which the whole density of the semiosphere is permeated. Translation is a primary mechanism of consciousness. To express something in another language is a way of understanding it. And since in the majority of cases the different languages of the semiosphere are semiotically asymmetrical, i.e. they do not have mutual semantic correspondences, then the whole semiosphere can be regarded as a generator of information. (1990: 127)

The difficulties which this term involves are connected with the exuberance of languages actively working within a semiosphere and the lack of “semantic correspondences” (Lotman 1990: 127) among them. Furthermore, the asymmetry of languages leads to the generation of information. The generated information is a processed output of the languages which can be found in a semiosphere. It follows that the generated information, in its specific way, can be treated as something new, yet at the same time it includes traces of the original languages. Lotman illustrates this phenomenon using the example of cinema, which developed from street peep-shows to a fully-fledged art (1990: 124). Moreover, Lotman points out that the languages which are in the centre of a semiosphere are “[t]he most developed and structurally organized” (1990: 127), contrary to those which are on the periphery.

To apply Lotman’s theory to the analysis of Samuel Beckett’s “A Wet Night”, one needs first to determine the core of the story’s semiosphere, remembering that the semiosphere is recognised as a structure. It is well known that Beckett regarded Dante Alighieri, along with James Joyce, as the most important and influential of writers. Numerous references to *The Divine Comedy* can be found, for example, in his letters (2009: 25, 35, 82, 185). Thus it is no surprise that references to Dante’s masterpiece can be noticed in “A Wet Night” as well. Moreover, the intertextual allusions in the short story refer not only to figures from *The Divine Comedy* but also to its plot. However, the plot of “A Wet Night” is a variation on the original story, and thus can be analysed in Lotmanian categories of asymmetry. In the first part of the story, Belacqua, whose name is

taken from *The Divine Comedy*, is wandering around Dublin, which he perceives as if it were Dantean Florence. The topographical description of places and streets of the city allows the reader to reconstruct Belacqua's night-time wandering around Dublin. The story mentions such places as "Lincoln Place", "Pearse Street", "the Queens", "the Dental Hospital", "Johnston, Mooney and O'Brien's clocks" (2010b: 109, 127). At the same time, Belacqua's mind produces images of Florence and the city's famous places, such as "Piazza della Signoria" or "Palazzo Vecchio" (2010b: 109-110), which are superimposed upon the topography of Dublin. Belacqua's journey into the dark resembles Dante's travels through hell and purgatory. For example, the protagonist perceives trams not as a means of transport but as "monsters, moaning along beneath the wild gesture of the trolley" (2010b: 109). Additionally, in the central scene of the story, namely the party at Calikan Frica's house, a passionate discussion about literature takes place. The Professor of Bullscrit and Comparative Ovoidology brings up the topic of Ravenna, which is subsequently echoed by other guests. Suddenly, the Man of Law remarks that "Dante died there [in Ravenna]" (2010b: 124).

It is also worth analysing how Beckett processes Dante's oeuvre for his artistic purposes, bearing in mind that *The Divine Comedy* becomes the core of his story. A far as the setting is concerned, the space of Dante's hell is superimposed upon the topography of Dublin. Moreover, motifs used in *The Divine Comedy* are presented in "A Wet Night" in an ironic manner. *The Divine Comedy* starts as follows: "Half way along the road we have to go, / I found myself obscured in a great forest, / Bewildered, and I knew I had lost the way" (*Inferno* I, 1-3). The subject finds himself in an unknown place, which is the beginning of his journey; then he meets Virgil, who eventually becomes his guide. In "A Wet Night" the situation is reversed: Belacqua first meets his friend, Jean du Chas, a poet, and afterwards he sets off on his journey into "the dark". The irony is fully captured in the scene where Jean du Chas goes with

Belacqua to a bar. There, the poet orders the protagonist to drink, saying the command “in a voice of thunder” (2010b: 111). Afterwards Belacqua “waddled out of the bar and into the street and up like a bit dirt into a Hoover” (2010b: 112), which can be interpreted as the symbolic start of a journey. However, Belacqua’s guide, Jean du Chas, does not follow him, which paradoxically means that the protagonist, who is arguably drunk, sets out on the journey without a guide. These two scenes in their asymmetry of events correspond with Lotman’s theory. Since these two texts (languages) cannot be translated in a literal way, they start to function as an “asymmetrical translation”, which in fact opens “A Wet Night” up to a variety of new meanings, symbols and motifs.

Moreover, “A Wet Night” bears similarities to Lotman’s theory of the asymmetrical relationship involved in translating a text from one language to another. Lotman indicates that when one translates a text from one language (for instance English, or  $T_1$ ) into another one (for instance French, or  $T_2$ ) and then he or she tries to translate it back from  $T_2$  into  $T_1$ , he or she will not obtain  $T_1$  or even  $T_1'$  but  $T_3$ , a completely new text (1990: 14-15). The reason seems to be clear: different natural languages very often do not have symmetrical equivalents for certain words or expressions, hence such a translation is asymmetrical. This model can also be applied to the analysed fragments of “A Wet Night” and *The Divine Comedy*; they represent samples of dissimilar languages which cannot be translated word for word. In addition, Lotman also proposes the theory of a text’s capacity for memory, based on *Hamlet*. He suggests that “*Hamlet* is not just a play by Shakespeare, but it is also the memory of all its interpretations, and what is more, it is also the memory of all those historical events which occurred outside the text but with which Shakespeare’s text can evoke associations” (1990: 18-19). Thus the text of *The Divine Comedy* is not interpreted by Samuel Beckett only, as it already contains the memory and interpretations of many generations of readers who have preceded him. Moreover, Beckett’s

interpretative difficulties may derive from the fact that both Dante and Beckett lived and created in completely different realities and represented different cultural and intellectual backgrounds.

The suggestion that Belacqua is heading towards hell rather than heaven appears immediately after he leaves the pub, when he buys “a paper of a charming little sloven” (2010b: 112). This paper deals with the topic of the female body and fuels Belacqua’s obsession with “the scarlet gown” (2010b: 112), especially whether the back of the gown is open or not. On the one hand, the symbol of the scarlet gown becomes associated with eroticism and sexuality, which increases the oneiric, dense atmosphere of “A Wet Night”; on the other, the symbol has Biblical connotations, similar to those in the passage from Joyce’s *Ulysses* where Leopold Bloom is accused of being “a worshipper of the Scarlet Woman” (1961: 492). In both examples, i.e. Beckett’s and Joyce’s, the motif alludes to the Whore of Babylon from the Book of Revelation.<sup>2</sup> The above-mentioned example of the “scarlet gown” shows how a common physical object (a gown), placed within a semiosphere, comes to be encircled by a variety of motifs and possible interpretations, such as Dante’s hell and the birth of Christ, on the one hand, and erotic crudeness on the other. The interrelation of the contradictory metaphors only reinforces the structure of the artistic text, in keeping with Lotman’s theory of mutual opposites (1977: 37).

The asymmetry of languages is also noticeable in another scene from “A Wet Night”, namely the meeting of Belacqua with a Civic Guard. At this point, it should be mentioned that it is the first time we meet Belacqua after he has left the bar. Standing by the Dental Hospital, Belacqua, possibly still drunk, begins to look at his dirty hands. Suddenly he notices that:

---

<sup>2</sup> The topic has been presented in a variety of publications: e.g. Daniel R. Schwartz, *Reading Joyce’s Ulysses* (1987) or Vincent J. Cheng, *Joyce, Race, and Empire* (1995).

The next thing was his hands dragged roughly down from his eyes, which he opened on the vast crimson face of an ogre. For a moment it was still, plush gargoyle, then it moved, it was convulsed. This, he thought, is the face of some person talking. It was. It was that part of a Civic Guard pouring abuse upon him. (2010b: 127)

This passage draws on a well-established literary convention, namely the moment when the protagonist is near his or her goal, but in order to reach it, he or she needs to overcome a final obstacle, very often personified as a monster or a villain. There are numerous examples of this convention in literature, such as Scylla and Charybdis in the *Odyssey* and *Jason and the Argonauts*, or the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In “A Wet Night”, Belacqua’s destination is a party held at Lincoln Place, but first he has to fight with a “monster”: a creature who is described first as a fantastic “ogre” and “plush gargoyle” and then transforms into a substantial “Civic Guard” (2010b: 127). The comparison of the Civic Guard to an ogre may be interpreted in terms of the asymmetry of languages of art proposed by Lotman. Lotman argues that “[i]n secondary modelling systems, [...] we also encounter the convergence of not two but many independent structures; here the sign no longer constitutes an equivalent pair, but a bundle of mutually equivalent elements drawn from various systems” (1977: 36). On the basis of this theory, one can notice the equivalent for the pair ogre-Civic guard in *The Divine Comedy*, Inferno, Canto XXI, which not only describes a similar pair, but also, as a different system, or text, presents the scene in an asymmetrical manner:

I saw there was a black devil behind us,  
And he was running in our direction up the crag.

Ah, and how ferocious was his appearance!  
And in his bearing, how much cruelty,  
With his wings open, and his light-footedness!

His shoulders which were pointed and seemed proud,  
Were burdened with the two legs of a sinner,  
And in each hand he grasped the nerve of a foot. (ll. 29-36)

The grotesque description of the devil, who is responsible for punishing frauds and corrupted politicians, is contrasted with that of the Civil Guard who upholds public order. Belacqua's misdemeanour can in no way be compared with the ones punished in hell. In fact, he is treated by the guard as a prowler whose very existence disturbs public order. Belacqua's sense of being insignificant corresponds with his name, a name which evokes associations with *The Divine Comedy*. While Dante only travels through hell as an observer, Beckett's Belacqua seems to live, if not in hell, then at least in purgatory. It is also worth noting that Belacqua's namesake appears in *The Divine Comedy*, Purgatorio, Canto IV and is described by Dante as the one who "[w]as sitting, with his hands clasped round his knees, / And his head bowed down and touching them" (ll. 107-108). In *The Divine Comedy*, Belacqua epitomises laziness and indolence. When Dante asks him what he is waiting for, he only answers "[b]rother, what is the good of going up?" (l. 127).<sup>3</sup>

If one compares Belacqua's behaviour in Dante and Beckett in semiotic categories, similarities appear. Beckett's Belacqua shows indolence, which eventually leads to his being detained by a civil guard. Instead of heading for the party, he stands in the middle of a street, analysing his hands. He repeats the same action at the end of the story when "he began to try would they work, clenching them and unclenching, keeping them moving for the wonder of his weak eyes" (2010b: 138). A similar ending appears in Beckett's *Dream of Fair to Middling*

<sup>3</sup> The vast range of detailed studies focusing on the importance of Dantean texts in Samuel Beckett's oeuvre can be found in the research of Antoni Libera, for instance in "The Lost Ones: A Myth of Human History and Destiny", Libera and Pyda *Jesteście na Ziemi, na to rady nie ma! Dialogi o teatrze Samuela Becketta [You are on earth. There's no cure for that! Dialogues on Samuel Beckett's theatre]* (2015) or S. E. Gontarski *Samuel Beckett. Humanistic Perspectives* (1982).

*Women* (1932, first published 1992), a novel which Beckett wrote at the same time as *More Pricks*, but was not able to publish (Beckett 2009: 102-108, 121).

In terms of Lotman's model, the above-mentioned sentence involves several layers; the first layer refers to the sign, namely to language which creates the space and the boundary of the sentence, or semiosphere. Secondly, the layer of the secondary modelling system is superimposed on the first layer; the secondary modelling layer filters non-texts, in this case *The Divine Comedy* and *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, and begins to function in new contexts, simultaneously creating new meanings. The ending of both scenes in "A Wet Night" and *The Divine Comedy* is similar as well; the Guard orders Belacqua first to "hold on there" and then to "move on" (2010b: 128). Dante is told by Malacoda, a devil commander, to "keep up upon the ridge above the bank" (l. 110). Both events create a kind of frame for the scenes; Belacqua can continue his journey to the party, Dante his journey through the circles of hell.

Before moving to the significance of Bergson's philosophy in "A Wet Night", it is worth mentioning Beckett's interest in this matter. In *Creative Involution: Bergson, Beckett, Deleuze*, Stanley E. Gontarski observes:

Samuel Beckett's lifelong interest in, if not his preoccupation with, the relationship of mind to body (much generated through his interest in and critique of the work of René Descartes – his focus on, presumably, 'Descartes' errors' as well) is well if often uncritically detailed in the critical discourse. (2015: 24)

Then, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, Gontarski claims that

He [Samuel Beckett] had read Henri Bergson closely, however, since he was teaching him at Trinity College, Dublin (1930-1931), where he drew a distinction for his class between Proust's sense of time and that of Bergson, Proust's more dualist and relative,

Bergson's an absolute time, at least according to notes recorded by one of his students in that class, Rachel Burrows. (2014: 4)

Beckett's interest in Bergsonian philosophy is evinced in his early writings. In *Murphy* we read that “[Murphy] felt himself split into two, a body and a mind” (2010a: 68). The 1930 essay *Proust* deals with a similar topic, and the construction of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* presents a concise study of mind and body, especially in the chapter *Und*. The Bergsonian spirit is equally present in “A Wet Night”.

It seems that a sense of existing in two systems plays a significant role in Beckett's oeuvre. One can find profound reflection upon this subject not only in the above-mentioned examples but also in later works. In *Memory and Matter*, Bergson attempts to capture the moment when a subject, who perceives his mind and body as an independent, separate identity, finally realises that besides him/her there exists an external world in which there are other entities, places and phenomena. The act of the subject's awakening eventually leads to a kind of interaction in which the subject is involved. Moreover, treating the subject, in semiotic categories, as a separate semiosphere, which comes to be influenced by non-texts or other semiospheres, also allows us to recognise the dualism of the world. In *Memory and Matter* one can find several examples describing the dualistic system:

*How is it that the same images can belong at the same time to two different systems, the one in which each image varies for itself and in the well-defined measure that it is patient of the real action of surrounding images, the other in which all change for a single image, and in the varying measure that they reflect the eventual action of this privileged image? (2007: 13, original emphasis)*

And:

Now no philosophical doctrine denies that the same images can enter at the same time into two distinct systems, one belonging to

science, wherein each image, related only to itself, possesses an absolute value; and the other, the world of *consciousness*, wherein all the images depend on a central image, our body, the variations of which they follow. (2007: 13-14)

In Lotman's model, the border between the semiosphere and non-semiosphere is the place where external information is, on the one hand, recycled and adapted to the semiosphere, while on the other, it changes the inner structure of the semiosphere. The equivalent of the Lotmanian border in Bergson's philosophy may be the body. In *Memory and Matter* Bergson argues:

Here are external images, then my body, and, lastly, the changes brought about by my body in the surrounding images. I see plainly how external images influence the image that I call my body: they transmit movement to it. And I also see how this body influences external images: it gives back movement to them. My body is, then, in the aggregate of the material world, an image which acts like other images, receiving and giving back movement [...] (2007: 4-5)

In this fragment, it is worth pointing out how Bergson recognises the importance of the body, which he treats as a kind of filter that both transmits, and has an influence on, internal and external images. At this point Bergson's argument resembles Lotman's concept of a non-text (an external image) which, filtered through the border of a semiosphere (a body), becomes part of this semiosphere (an internal image), simultaneously changing its structure, or, in Bergsonian categories, its image. The notion of the body as a filter between the external and internal world, or a non-text and text, can be observed in Beckett's works as well. In his early short story *The Assumption* (1929), the role of silence and sound is indispensable for the subject to recognise his position and confirm that the external world is real and does not exist only in the subject's mind, while in the final scene of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*

Belacqua begins to feel pain in his arm – a symbol of physicality. The complex, mathematical instruction on how to suck pebbles presented in *Molloy* (1951) similarly works as the subject's attempt to become anchored in reality.

The Bergson-Lotman model can also be applied in the analysis of "A Wet Night". For instance, according to Lotman's theory, the characters' predilection for enumerating apparently unnecessary items in their dialogues, an action which in its deceptive pointlessness resembles the pebble sucking in *Molloy*, plays an important aesthetic role. Lotman recognises that these "external stimuli" "act on our organs of sense, we continue to see, hear, feel, and experience joy or suffering, regardless of whether we understand what these things mean or not" (1977: 57). Similarly, in Bergsonian theories such references may directly correspond with the memory of the subject. If one compares Bergson's theory of pure memory and perception with the apparently nonsense interjections in Beckett's oeuvre, such as names of places, people or items, one may better understand why they appear suddenly, apparently in places where they should not. They may also serve, in Lotman's categories, as textual elements which build the fabric of the artistic text. In this sense, one can recognise an intriguing correlation between Bergson and Lotman's theories, a correlation that is made present in Beckett's short story. The following fragment describing a party in "A Wet Night" may be used as an illustration:

"Allow me" said the rising strumpet: "a sandwich: egg, tomato, cucumber."

"Did you know" blundered the Man of Law "that the Swedes have no fewer than seventy varieties of Smoerrbroed?"

The voice of the arithmomaniac was heard:

"The arc" he said, stooping to all in the great plainness of his words, "is longer than its chords."

"Madam knows Ravenna?" said the paleographer.

"Do I know Ravenna!" exclaimed the Parabimbi. "Sure I know Ravenna. A sweet and noble city."

"You know of course" said the Man of Law "that Dante died there."  
"Right" said the Parabimbi, "so, he did".

A pure memory, which may have come from the author's personal experience, in this case Beckett's, is gradually being recycled and placed in new contexts, vicariously by the memory-image and perception. The memory A is transformed into A', A" etc., finally becoming only a mirage of the original, and starting to function as an autonomous element of the fictional world. The author can consciously, or unconsciously, refer in his work to the concept of Bergsonian memory; for instance, in the sentence, "Did you know' blundered the Man of Law 'that the Swedes have no fewer than seventy varieties of Smoerrbroed?", the information about the Swedes might come from the author's personal experience and might have been heard in another context, but in the text of "A Wet Night" it functions as a part of the Man of Law's monologue. Suffice it to say that the paleographer's question about Ravenna works in a similar manner. The context of this fragment of "A Wet Night", namely the house party, is a typical example of a situation where people are chatting and switching from one subject to another, which creates a sense that everyone is talking but nobody is listening.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the repetitions correlate with Bergson's theory, in which repetitions, especially mechanical ones, are the basis of a distinction between *remembrance* and *acquisition*. The purely nonsense sentences come to play a completely different role when they are put in the context of the house party: this part of "A Wet Night" begins to function as a separate semiosphere, and its sentences, as they have lost their informational context, begin to function in artistic categories.

Moreover, the spirit of Bergsonian philosophy is discernible in the story in the scene where Belacqua finally appears at the party and is forced by the guests to say something. After a moment of silence, he says: "When with indifference I re-

<sup>4</sup> It is worth pointing out that the motif of talking as the confirmation of the existence of the subject is a recurring element of Beckett's signature, e.g. *Happy Days* (1961), *Play* (1963) or *Not I* (1972).

member my past sorrow, my mind has indifference, my memory has sorrow. The mind, upon the indifference which is in it, is indifferent; yet the memory, upon the sorrow which is in it, is not sad" (2010b: 135-136). Belacqua's apparently non-sense utterance evokes the concept of memory presented by Bergson in *Matter and Memory*. In Bergson's view, memories are not stored in any specific place in the brain, but they are mingled with the present of the subject. The so-called pure memories can be provoked either by the senses or by mechanical memory. Seen in this light, the construction of "A Wet Night" resembles Belacqua's memory, which consists of fragmentary recollections, evoked by impulses rather than by the chronology of events.

In *Creative Involution*, Stanley Gontarski notes "Samuel Beckett's lifelong interest in, if not his preoccupation with, the relationship of mind and body" (2015: 24). This interest, ranging from the works of Descartes to Bergson and Proust, eventually resulted in Beckett's essay on Proust and in the poem *Whoroscope*, dealing with Descartes' philosophy, both published in 1930. The bipolar relationship between the "outside" and "inside" or between the "mind" and "body", combined with the idea that the external world influences the constitution of the body, evokes, in my opinion, the semiotic model proposed by Lotman: the model where non-texts, filtered by the border of the semiosphere, finally create a new entity, or a semiosphere. The present textual analysis of "A Wet Night" bears out the proposed Bergsonian-Lotmanian model. The basic structure of the story is built of signs, which create the language of the text. Subsequently, the author's, in this case Beckett's, borrowings from other texts (languages) begin to multiply, and build the semiosphere of the work, eventually leading to the creation of the text's fabric. Bergson's philosophy, in this instance, becomes the core of the work, contributing to the artistic and philosophical enhancement of the semiosphere of "A Wet Night". In this way the three ingredients create the "synthetical syrup" of Samuel Beckett's work.

## References

- Ackerley, Chris (2013). "The Bible". In: Anthony Uhlmann (ed.). *Samuel Beckett in Context*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Adamo, Giuliana (2000). "Twentieth-century recent theories on beginnings and endings of novels". *Annali d'Italianistica* 18: 49-76.
- Beckett Samuel (2012). *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. New York: Arcade Publishing.
- Beckett, Samuel (2009). *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*. Volume I: 1929-1940. Martha Fehsenfeld, Dow Overbeck, Lois More (eds). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Beckett, Samuel (2010a). *The Selected Works of Samuel Beckett*. Volume I. New York: Grove Press.
- Beckett, Samuel (2010b). *The Selected Works of Samuel Beckett*. Volume IV. New York: Grove Press.
- Bergson, Henri (2007). *Memory and Matter*. New York: Cosimo Classics.
- Cheng, Vincent J. (1995). *Joyce, Race, and Empire*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Dante (2008). *The Divine Comedy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gontarski, Stanley (2015). *Creative Involution: Bergson, Beckett, Deleuze*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Gontarski, Stanley (2014). *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Joyce, James (1961). *Ulysses*. London: Random House.
- Libera, Antoni, Janusz Pyda OP (2015). *Jesteście na Ziemi, na to rady nie ma! Dialogi o teatrze Samuela Becketta*. Kraków: Dominikańskie Studium Filozofii i Teologii.
- Libera, Antoni (1982). "The Lost Ones: A myth of human history and destiny". In: P. Aster, M. Beja, S. E. Gontarski (eds.). *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Lotman, Yuri (1977). *The Structure of the Artistic Text*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Lotman, Yuri (1990). *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. London – New York: I.B. Tauris & CO. LTD.
- Lotman, Yuri (2009). *Culture and Explosion*. Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Schwartz, Daniel R. (1987). *Reading Joyce's Ulysses*. London: Macmillan.

Tonning, Erik (2014). *Modernism and Christianity*. Basingstoke:  
Palgrave Macmillan.

Rafał Borkowski  
Filologiczne Studia Doktoranckie  
Uniwersytet Gdańskie  
Wita Stwosza 51  
80-308 Gdańsk  
Poland  
[R.Borkowski1@gmail.com](mailto:R.Borkowski1@gmail.com)



## **Biblical and psychoanalytic allegory in Jane White's *Quarry***

KAROL CHOJNOWSKI

*Received 9.01.2017,  
received in revised form 23.10.2017,  
accepted 9.11.2017.*

### **Abstract**

This article attempts to prove that Jane White's novel *Quarry* is centred around two interrelated allegories: biblical and psychoanalytic. The characters lend themselves to allegorical interpretation either as equivalents of biblical figures or as representations of psychoanalytic concepts. It is argued that the overlapping of the biblical and psychoanalytic allegories produces a radical revision of Freud's view on religion. Freud believed that all religious behaviour stems from the Oedipus complex; *Quarry*, this article claims, relates the Oedipus complex not to the origin of faith but to its loss. The article also discusses *Quarry*'s ideological ambiguity in its attitude towards religion and suggests what this ambiguity derives from.

### **Key words**

Christ-like figure, Freud, Jane White, Oedipus complex, *Quarry*, religion, the unconscious

## Biblijna i psychoanalityczna alegoria w powieści *Quarry* Jane White

### Abstrakt

W niniejszym artykule staram się udowodnić, że powieść Jane White pt. *Quarry* skoncentrowana jest wokół dwóch powiązanych alegorii: biblijnej oraz psychoanalitycznej. Bohaterów powieści można zinterpretować alegorycznie, bądź to jako odpowiedniki postaci biblijnych, bądź to jako przedstawienia pojęć psychoanalitycznych. Twierdzę też, że nałożenie na siebie alegorii biblijnej oraz psychoanalitycznej prowadzi do radykalnej rewizji poglądów Freuda na religię. Freud wierzył, że zachowania religijne mają swoje źródło w kompleksie Edypa; powieść *Quarry*, jak usiłuję wykazać, wiąże kompleks Edypa nie z pochodzeniem wiary, lecz z jej utratą. W artykule omawiam także ideologiczną dwuznaczność powieści *Quarry* w odniesieniu do religii oraz czynniki decydujące o tej dwuznaczności.

### Słowa kluczowe

Freud, Jane White, kompleks Edypa, nieświadomość, postać mesjańska, *Quarry*, religia

### 1. Introduction

The present article discusses the novel *Quarry* by Jane White, who was a little-known English author living in the years 1934–1985. Jane White is a pen name of Jane Brady (cf. Nedelkoff 2008). Under this pseudonym, in the years 1967–1979, she wrote seven novels and one piece of non-fiction (cf. Griffiths 2011, “Jane White” 2008).<sup>1</sup> *Quarry* is Jane White’s 1967 debut novel but she “has written plays, poetry, verse dramas for as long as she can remember. Her first novel (un-

<sup>1</sup> Other novels by Jane White are: *Proxy* (1968), *Beatrice*, *Falling* (1968), *Retreat in Good Order* (1970), *Left for Dead* (1971), *Comet* (1975) and *Benjamin’s Open Day* (1979). She also published an autobiographical book entitled *Norfolk Child* (1973).

published) was completed at the age of nine" (White 1968: dust jacket info). Two facts indicate that Jane White's works have slipped into a literary limbo: not only is Wikipedia silent about her (as of October 2017) but also she is featured on *The Neglected Books Page*, a website devoted to forgotten books. Besides, there does not seem to be any scholarly interest in her oeuvre.

*Quarry* seems to be a rather complex and puzzling novel, in spite of its ostensibly simple plot about three boys bullying a fourth one and keeping him imprisoned in a cave (a detailed summary will be provided later on). Brooks Peters, former editor in chief of *Quest* magazine, describes *Quarry* as "a real enigma. I can't figure out what it is really about except perhaps the breakdown of society" (qtd. in "Jane White" 2008). The reviewer Richard Freeman notices that *Quarry* "is an allegory with a variety of more or less cosmic overtones" and he claims that "the cave is philosophically associated with the one in Plato's *Republic*" (qtd. in "Jane White" 2008). Nevertheless, Freeman concludes that "[u]ltimately, the book is about the complex symbiosis between prosecutor and prey" (qtd. in "Jane White" 2008). Admittedly, the cave in *Quarry* may evoke associations with Plato's myth of the cave, but it is far from obvious how – and if – this framework was applied by Jane White. The view that the "prosecutor and prey" theme dominates the novel is not entirely convincing either and the "breakdown of society" theme seems to be an even less useful key to *Quarry*.

The aim of this article is to shed some light on this "enigma" by employing structuralism and semiotics as the main methodological tools. The analysis of *Quarry* will also draw upon some psychoanalytic concepts as originally developed by Freud. However, rather than using psychoanalysis as a methodology, the present article will treat it as a source of inspiration behind the novel, alongside the biblical inspirations. While alternative interpretations, such as those mentioned above, cannot be dismissed, it will be argued that the novel is predominantly allegorical. Consequently, the analysis will focus

on an allegorical interpretation of the main characters. An allegory can be defined as “a story [...] with a double meaning: a primary or surface meaning; and a secondary or under-the-surface meaning. It is a story, therefore, that can be read, understood and interpreted at two levels (and in some cases at three or four levels)” (Cuddon 1982: 24). Encyclopædia Britannica adds that an allegory is “a [...] fictional narrative that conveys a meaning not explicitly set forth in the narrative”. It is a “meaning [...] that the reader can understand only through an interpretive process” (“Allegory: Art and literature” 2017). In a similar vein, Janina Abramowska (2003) defines the essence of allegory as “an interplay between two semantic planes: the literal plane functions as a vehicle for hidden meanings, which are basically more significant” (translation mine). Henceforth the primary meaning of an allegory will be called “the literal level” and the secondary meaning will be called “the allegorical level”.

In the light of the above definitions, we can say that two kinds of allegory are present in the novel: biblical and psychoanalytic. Particular characters in the novel can be read as signs that stand for biblical figures or, alternatively, for certain psychoanalytic concepts. The biblical allegory involves a Christ-like figure (the bullied boy), serpent-like figures (the three bullies) and a character that stands for Eve or for conscience (the girl in the pink dress). In addition, the biblical allegory is combined with a psychoanalytic one. In the light of psychoanalysis, the three bullies stand for various aspects of one boy’s mind while the Christ-like bullied boy is the three boys’ idea of a “father”. The article proposes the thesis that the combination of the two allegories – biblical and psychoanalytic – results in a modification, perhaps even reversal, of the Freudian model of religion. Briefly speaking, Freud’s idea was that the Oedipus complex is the ultimate source of all religion; *Quarry*, by contrast, seems to link the resolution of the Oedipal conflict with the loss of faith rather than with its inception.

Apart from the combination of the two allegories, the other thesis of the present analysis is the ideological ambiguity of

*Quarry*. The claim that an allegorical text is ambiguous requires some explanation. Okopień-Sławińska (2002) stresses the fact that “the bond between [the literal and the allegorical meaning] is highly conventional and is based on parallels established by literary, cultural, religious [...] etc. traditions [...] The conventionalised nature of allegory makes it different from a symbol” (23–24, translation mine). In other words, an allegory, as opposed to symbol, is relatively unambiguous. Accordingly, the links between the characters in *Quarry* and their biblical / psychoanalytic equivalents are rather clearly defined. How, then, can we claim that there is ambiguity in *Quarry*? It arises, first, from the very combination of the two different allegories (and from the *way* they are combined), and second, from the tone of the last scenes and their symbolic (i.e. ambiguous) quality. The ambiguity pertains to the novel’s approach to faith and religion. *Quarry* seems to present the loss of faith as a natural process connected with growing up, at the same time intimating that this process may be unfortunate or pernicious.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. A summary of the novel

Because Jane White’s works are virtually forgotten, it is necessary to provide a summary of *Quarry* before discussing it. The novel is set in England, probably in the 1960s, during a long spell of excessively hot weather. Three grammar-school boys – Todd, Randy and Carter – bully a young boy into coming with them to a cave in a forsaken quarry. Todd is the leader of the trio. Todd and Randy are “about eighteen” (White 1967: 61), Carter is fifteen (White 1967: 101) and their victim is about twelve (White 1967: 62). The bullies intend to keep the boy inside to play a “game”, as they call it, but no explanation of the game is provided. The boy they choose as their prey is very

<sup>2</sup> Abramowska mentions another situation in which allegory can be viewed as ambiguous. It is when one adopts a “redefinition of allegory, extending the term to cover a whole variety of literary phenomena involving a double or [...] multiple meaning” (Abramowska 2003: 18, translation mine). The redefinition means that one forgoes the distinction between symbol and allegory and subsumes the former under the common heading “allegory”. However, such a “symbol-turned-allegory” is not the kind of ambiguous allegory that is meant here.

enigmatic. He follows the bullies without being forced to and stays in the cave for a long time without being guarded or tied up. He persistently refuses to reveal his name or identity. He seems to have no family; no one looks for him when he stays in the cave. Frequently, he does not behave like a child at all. "The boy was patient, and most unchildlike" (White 1967: 201). The three boys provide food and equipment for the nameless boy. In the end, they organize a kind of trial and sentence him to death; then they take knives and stab him. To their astonishment, the dying boy does not bleed at all. Afterwards, they burn the body along with all the equipment in the cave. Finally, the cave collapses as the rocks have cracked after the heatwave. Meanwhile, Todd's widowed mother, Clare, is courted by a certain Mark Savory. Todd and his friends feel uneasy about him but Clare accepts Mark's marriage proposal. She promises Todd not to mention the topic of the quarry to Mark on condition that Todd comes with her and Mark on a trip to Italy. (She does not know what happens in the quarry but has her suspicions.) The last scene shows Todd with his mother and Mark, waiting for the train. The scene features another lone little boy that Todd talks to before departure.

The nameless boy's death is foreshadowed by the death of a girl. One day when the bullies come to the cave, they see a girl in a pink dress playing alone at the bottom of the quarry. The bullies decide to "go down and settle it" (White 1967: 148) because they are convinced that she has noticed them up in the cave and they fear she may tell somebody about the boy. Randy takes a knife, supposedly "only to frighten her with" (White 1967: 149), and they start to chase her along the valley, trying to keep hidden from her sight. When she climbs the slope at the end of the valley, Randy manages to grab her foot for a moment but then she tugs it free and climbs over the lip of the cliff. However, immediately after she escapes the bullies, she is run over by a motorcycle and dies.

It is also important to note a non-allegorical religious subplot connected with Randy. He is a Catholic, "and he believed with a kind of loveless obstinacy which had its roots mainly in

fear" (White 1967: 25). It is this fear that for a long time prevents him from rejecting "a faith he longed to discard" (White 1967: 25). His faith is obsessively ritualistic, which corresponds with his pedantic nature. Moreover, Randy, true to his meaningful name, is torn between his lust and the lingering remains of his faith. He alternates between unsuccessful attempts to have sex with various girls (Carter's sister included) and making frequent confessions, also ineffective. Ultimately, he decides to give up his faith – and he does so in a way which is "as ritualistic, as meaningless" (White 1967: 223), as his religious practices were. In one of the last scenes, Randy finally has sex with a girl – possibly a prostitute. (As far as the other two boys are concerned, we do not know anything about their religious convictions.)

### **3. The biblical framework**

The nameless boy can be seen as a Christ-like figure for several reasons. First, there are a few factors which invite an allegorical interpretation of the boy: he has no fixed identity, he does not behave like a child and he is a fantastic figure in that he does not bleed when stabbed (in fact, all these three factors make him to some extent fantastic, and, by the same token, allegorical). Second, it is stressed that the boy's imprisonment in the cave takes place on a Friday (White 1967: 59), like Christ's death. Third, the boy's behaviour echoes Christ's wilful sacrifice. The boy follows Todd and his friends to the cave of his own free will and stays there for days and weeks without being bound. When the bullies put him on "trial", he accepts the guilty verdict. Besides, the cave, which becomes the boy's grave, resembles Christ's sepulchre, "which [...] had [been] hewn out in the rock" (The King James Bible, Matt. 27, 60).

The location of the cave in a quarry provides quite an intriguing biblical allusion, too. Archaeological findings show that Mount Calvary, where Christ was crucified – now the site of the Holy Sepulchre Church – used to be a quarry. "The 1961 restorations opened archaeological trenches in various points

of the church. From these trenches it is now known with certainty that the area served as a stone quarry from the eighth to the first centuries BC" ("From quarry to garden" 2011). This context serves as an additional link between the nameless boy and Christ.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, this perspective reinforces and enriches the allegorical dimension of the quarry in the novel, where bleak and oppressive imagery plays a vital part: "the landscape blazed in the sun. [...] the trees and bushes seemed to sway in the heat as if they were in some kind of stately ritual dance. They no longer looked green; they seemed to have given up all their colour to the sun and to have become a uniform grey" (White 1967: 56). And some time later: "The low bushes still seemed to lean and quiver in the heat, and the yellow earth showing between their scrawny stems looked drier and more thinly spread over the bare rock face than ever" (White 1967: 99).

The scene of the chase after the girl in *Quarry* contains a biblical reference, too. Todd, chasing the girl, tries to hide from view by crawling in the grass. This resembles the movement of a snake and thus relates Todd to the biblical serpent. Todd crawls in the dust, which alludes to the way God curses the serpent in Genesis 3,14: "upon thy belly shalt thou go and dust shalt thou eat". In *Quarry*, "the dust [is] caking [Todd's] skin" (White 1967: 150). The same parallel with the serpent is present when Randy "grabbed at [the girl's] foot. She kicked back savagely [...] and caught him on the cheek bone with her heel" (White 1967: 155). This is a rather obvious allusion to the passage from Genesis: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3,15).

---

<sup>3</sup> One may wonder whether Jane White had actually learned about the archaeological discoveries (and thus whether the allusion was deliberate on her part), given the relatively short time span between the excavations (1961) and the publication of *Quarry* (1967). However, it is possible that she had, because "from the beginning of the works, the archaeologist [Father Virgilio Corbo] published preliminary reports at regular intervals in the scientific journal 'Liber Annus' as well as a number of more popular articles in various magazines and journals" ("The archeological excavations" 2011).

This time, then, it is Randy who plays the part of the serpent. Curiously enough, the Freudian interpretation of the three boys as allegorical manifestations of different sides of one boy's personality adds coherence to the biblical allusion because it means that the serpent-like acts: Todd's crawling in the dust and Randy's catching at the girl's foot are performed by the same person. We will come back to the interpretation of this scene towards the end of our discussion.

#### **4. Psychoanalytic perspective**

In his book *Totem and Taboo*, Freud expressed his views on the relationship between culture, religion and the Oedipus complex. The latter, as we know, means sexual desire for one's mother and jealousy about the father. Now, "Freud notes two prohibitions present in all civilizations [...] These are the taboos against incest and patricide. Freud shows that they are linked and he begins by considering the taboo on incest. The exact origin of this taboo is unclear" (Chapman 2007: 30). In order to explain this, Freud proposes the "hypothesis of the primal horde" (Chapman 2007: 30). This prehistoric tribe – "a very large extended family" (Chapman 2007: 30) – is dominated by a single male, who maintains a harem consisting of all the females. Other "males, principally the leader's sons" (Chapman 2007: 30) are denied access to the females. The "father [...] drives away the growing sons" (Freud 1913: 71):

One day the expelled brothers joined forces, slew and ate the father, and thus put an end to the father horde. [...] a sense of guilt was formed which coincided here with the remorse generally felt. The dead now became stronger than the living had been [...] What the fathers' presence had formerly prevented they themselves now prohibited in the psychic situation of "subsequent obedience" [...] They undid their deed by declaring that the killing of the father substitute, the totem, was not allowed, and renounced the fruits of their deed by denying themselves the liberated women. Thus they created the two fundamental taboos of totemism out of the sense of guilt of the son, and for this very reason these had to cor-

respond with the two repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex. (Freud 1913: 72)

According to Freud, the sons “raise[d] up the killed father as a god. [...] these early rites developed into the systems of religion which we have today” (Chapman 2007: 31).

Chapman (2007: 32) “elaborate[s] on the similarities Freud found between totemic psychology and the Oedipus complex” in modern man:

The child [...] has an ambivalent attitude towards his father. The child is attached to his father through love and protection. However, the child also desires his mother’s sole attention and physical affection, and in the child’s imagination the father stands in the way of this bond. [...]

In childhood, unlike Freud’s primitive hordes, the boy does not murder his father but has to meet the conflicting situations of simultaneous love and hatred for the father and of unrealizable love for the mother in another way. [...] Generally speaking, the outcome of the Oedipus complex is for the boy to identify with his father and renounce competition for the mother. This renunciation of the incestuous relationship and elevation of the father is again the same as Freud outlined in the primal horde, although accomplished somewhat differently. (Chapman 2007: 32)

Both models of the Oedipus complex – primeval and modern – led Freud to believe that “all religious behavior, from the foundations of belief to subtle ritual, is grounded in the gratification of infantile desire” (Chapman 2007: 36). That is to say that the religious ritual is supposed to provide a sort of compensation for the unfulfilled incestuous and patricidal wishes.

Keeping this at the back of our minds, we can return to the analysis of Jane White’s *Quarry*. One can plausibly interpret Todd, Carter and Randy as allegories of different sides of one boy’s psyche. The device is akin to that of a doppelganger, only it involves three characters instead of two.

In literature, a doppelganger is usually shaped as a twin, shadow or a mirror image of a protagonist. [...] [I]t may be figured as one person existing in two different places at the same time. [...]

It may be used to show the “other self” of a character that he or she has not discovered yet. This “other self” could be the darker side of the character that troubles or the brighter side that motivates. Hence, it helps writers to portray complex characters. (“Doppelganger” 2016)

Such an interpretation of *Quarry* is encouraged by the fact that the three boys are presented with an extreme amount of parallelism. The first scenes featuring Todd, Randy and Carter separately are arranged in such a way that first we learn what Todd does on the evening after meeting the nameless boy, then what Carter does at the same time at a different location, and what Randy does at the same time. There are more such “simultaneous” sequences. The last three scenes of the novel, featuring the boys separately, though not simultaneously, also contain parallelisms (to be discussed later on).

Another argument in favour of the “three-in-one” interpretation is to be found in those passages which suggest a complementary relationship, even symbiosis between the three bullies. For example, at one point the narrator describes the trio in the following way:

the combination was formidable – [Carter’s] physical energy, [Todd’s] intellectual brilliance, [Randy’s] low cunning were its components [...] Randy felt that the impetus of it all sprang from him. If he were to withdraw his support, to check the flow of his very life blood into it, it would collapse into its component parts and into meaninglessness. (White 1967: 26)

On another occasion, when Todd and Randy talk about Carter, Todd says, “he fits. You and I on our own do not balance well. We need Carter for ballast. He prevents us from becoming top heavy” (White 1967: 95). Also, Carter “dimly perceived that he fulfilled some purpose as an interpreter, a link between them [Todd and Randy], and his own world” (White 1967: 101).

Again, when the boys destroy a breakwater, “they worked together in total co-operation” (White 1967: 137).

The general outline of the psychoanalytic allegory is then as follows. Todd, as the leader of the gang, represents consciousness, whereas Randy and Carter represent the unconscious.<sup>4</sup> The nameless boy stands for the idea of a father, while Randy and Carter represent opposite aspects of the Oedipus complex: Randy stands for “hatred for the father” (Chapman 2007: 32) and Carter stands for the love of him. (I will reserve the term “the allegorical boy” to denote the “three-in-one” boy, as opposed to the nameless boy.) The killing of the nameless boy represents the patricidal wish. Furthermore, the cave stands for the mind because it is in the cave that the allegorical conflict and its resolution take place. The cave is “something which no one else [...] knew existed” (White 1967: 101). This fact makes it similar to someone’s innermost thoughts and feelings.

The claim that the nameless boy represents the allegorical boy’s idea of a father is the first fact that requires explanation. To begin with, it must be noted that none of the three boys has a father. Not only Todd’s mother, Clare, is widowed, but also Randy’s parents are dead and the latter boy lives with his aunt and uncle. Carter’s father is supposedly dead, too, though Randy insinuates that he has left the family (White 1967: 64). Furthermore, Mark Savory, who is to become Todd’s stepfather, parallels the nameless boy. Mark, like the boy, uses “a precisely airy gesture” (White 1967: 72). “Savory waved his long white hand at Todd in an airy gesture of dismissal. Sickeningly, it exactly reproduced the airy gesture when the boy was in what Todd privately called his ‘rajah’ mood” (White 1967: 79). Therefore both Mark and the nameless boy can be thought of as substitutes for the missing father. The interpretation of the nameless boy as a father figure corresponds well with the fact that Todd, facing him, sometimes “felt he was

<sup>4</sup> I use the term *the unconscious* rather than *the subconscious* to denote “memories, feelings, and other mental content outside conscious awareness” (Miller 2016).

talking to someone considerably older, not younger than himself" (White 1967: 201).<sup>5</sup>

The blueprint of the Oedipus complex – with its incestuous impulse and ambivalent feelings for the father – can be traced in the novel both on the literal and on the allegorical level. The allegorical level both parallels and combines with the literal level. The relationship between Todd, his mother and future stepfather is modelled on the Oedipus complex because it is marked, on the one hand, by sexual tension between Todd and Clare and, on the other hand, by competition between Todd and Mark. The sexual tension between Todd and his mother is revealed especially in two parallel scenes: in one of them, Todd accidentally sees his mother's naked breasts and in the other, Clare, also accidentally, sees Todd naked. Besides, Todd calls his mother by her first name and admits before Mark that "she is too close to me – she makes demands –" (White 1967: 175). Mark Savory, in turn, is the paternal figure who may be perceived by Todd as a powerful rival competing for Clare's affections. Mark is "disconcertingly intelligent" (White 1967: 74), beats Todd at golf and is perceived by Todd with a mixture of respect and fear. Todd plays a sort of psychological game with Mark. The former thinks that in this game his mother is on his side and against Mark. But at the end it turns out that she has outwitted him and sided with Mark (White 1967: 195–196). Thus the incestuous impulse is resolved. What is more, in the light of the above-mentioned "three-in-one" interpretation, Randy's desire for Carter's sister can be interpreted as an incestuous drive, too. This, combined with the sexual tension

---

<sup>5</sup> Chapman notes that "it is possible that a child would be fatherless, have a weak father, etc. In this case, the psychical father would be whoever is responsible for protection, punishment, and the aggregate of other experiences Freud connects with the father. This psychical father could be a widowed mother, an uncle, or even an amalgamation of various people in the child's fantasy" (Chapman 2007: 31). In *Quarry*, several characters function as equivalents of the father: Carter's mother, Randy's carers, the nameless boy and Todd's future stepfather, Mark Savory. (Todd's widowed mother, however, does not fit into that class of characters.) The nameless boy performs the "father" function on the allegorical level, while the other characters do so on the literal level.

between Todd and his mother, yields a psychoanalytically coherent picture of the allegorical boy experiencing an incestuous desire for both his mother and sister.

Another way in which the Oedipus complex manifests itself in the novel is through the relationship between the three bullies and the nameless boy. The relationship highlights the ambivalence about the “father”. The nameless boy, like the Freudian father, is treated by the three boys with both respect and hatred. On the one hand, they provide for the mysterious boy and sometimes are scared of him (or at least disconcerted by him); on the other hand, they imprison him and kill him. At the same time, the bullies can be ascribed specific roles. As has been said, Randy represents hatred for the “father”, while Carter represents affection. Thus they represent two conflicting sides of the allegorical boy’s unconscious. Randy’s and Carter’s attitudes are revealed through the game either boy plays with the nameless boy. (There is a series of scenes in which each of the bullies comes separately to the cave and plays a different game with the boy.) Carter plays pirates; Randy engages in a vicious scuffle with the nameless boy, which the latter later calls playing “gangsters” (White 1967: 200). Carter has an extremely good time playing with the nameless boy, while Randy’s game is violent and involves hurting each other.<sup>6</sup> The allegorical meaning of Randy and Carter is additionally revealed through the two boys’ relationship with their carers: Randy is rebellious towards his aunt and uncle, while Carter is on good terms with his mother. But at this stage, it seems, the contrary impulses coming from the unconscious are yet unrepressed: they assert themselves, as if encroaching on the conscious. As a result, Todd, Randy and Carter (the conscious and the unconscious) commit the allegorical patricide together.

---

<sup>6</sup> Let us note, by the way, that the game reflects Randy’s “dark” personality. It does so not only because of the violence involved, but also because part of this scene takes place in complete darkness (cf. White 1967: 165-167). This corresponds with other scenes, in which Randy is almost always shown in the dark or in the shadow.

The last three scenes suggest that the allegorical “three-in-one” boy overcomes both the incestuous and the patricidal impulse and the Oedipus complex is resolved. We shall assume that overcoming the complex is roughly synonymous with its repression. In those scenes, Carter goes to sleep, Randy has sex with an unnamed girl in a field outside the town and Todd leaves for Italy with Clare and Mark. The last scenes with Carter and Randy take place at night, followed by the last scene with Todd, which takes place in daylight. We may assume that night signifies the unconscious and day – the conscious. The last scenes, then, suggest that both the hatred for the “father”, represented by Randy, and the affection, represented by Carter, are repressed into the unconscious. If we assume that the forbidden incestuous impulse is represented by Randy’s sexual urge, then it is repressed, too. Such an interpretation of the two night scenes is subtly but cogently corroborated by an inconspicuous detail: both Carter and Randy perceive the night as “unusually dark” (White 1967: 245) or “much darker than usual” (White 1967: 247).

The conscious-versus-unconscious interpretation receives further evidence if we examine the motif of rain. In all the three last scenes there is rain but only Todd is *aware* of it; Randy and Carter are both *unaware*. Carter is going to sleep and “the first heavy drops splashed down unnoticed” (White 1967: 245); Randy, who is having sex, “saw, without realising that he saw, the huge slow drops of rain [...] He did not feel them for a long time, although they struck his bare back” (White 1967: 248). (What the rain itself means will be discussed in a while.) Last but not least, Todd leaves the two boys behind as he is going to depart from England. The leaving behind can be another symbol of repression and of overcoming the Oedipal conflict. Additionally, the conscious-versus-unconscious significance of the last three scenes is foreshadowed by an earlier scene in which Todd drives a car at night, “staring unblinkingly” (White 1967: 138), with Randy and Carter *asleep* in their seats.

## 5. Modification of the Freudian idea

What casts doubt on the interpretation of *Quarry* as a simple illustration of Freud's views is the interplay between the psychoanalytic and the biblical allegory as well as the interplay between the allegorical and literal levels. On the whole, *Quarry* seems to introduce considerable modifications to Freud's view on the relationship between religious faith and the Oedipus complex. The Oedipal conflict seems to be presented by Jane White not as the foundation of faith but as the factor which causes its decline. In the novel, the resolution of the love-hate for the "father" coincides with what looks like a rejection of faith. To prove this point, we need to re-examine the relationship between the bullies and the nameless boy in the light of biblical allegory as well as analyse a few crucial scenes: the scene of killing the boy; the scene in which Randy definitively parts with religion; the final scene; and the scene of destroying a breakwater.

To see how the biblical and psychoanalytic allegories overlap, let us begin with a reinterpretation of the bullies' relationship with the nameless boy and an analysis of the first two of the above-mentioned scenes. The three boys may be interpreted not only as allegories of the conscious and the unconscious but also as representative of three types of faith. Todd's and Carter's attitude to religion on the literal level is not mentioned. However, since the nameless boy, apart from representing the Freudian "father", is also a Christ figure, the three boys' relationship with him may stand for their relationship to God. Thus, arguably, Carter's and Todd's types of faith are shown allegorically, especially through the games they play with the nameless boy, while Randy's type is presented both on the literal and on the allegorical level. Carter's "faith", then, is child-like and enthusiastic because he has fun playing with the nameless boy. Todd's "faith" is intellectual and truth-seeking because the game he plays with the nameless boy is a dialogue which resembles an interview, an interrogation, or

playing riddles.<sup>7</sup> As for Randy, he is troubled, not to say tormented by his faith on the literal level, and this fact is paralleled by the violent game he plays with the Christ-like boy.<sup>8</sup> Given this reinterpretation, it seems only natural to see the murder of the boy as an allegorical rejection of faith. This view receives further evidence if we juxtapose the literal religious subplot with the religious allegory in terms of narrative time. Randy's rejection of faith and religion takes place shortly before killing the boy. This suggests an analogy between the two events. The killing of the boy, which in psychoanalytic terms means the desire to kill the father, in biblical terms simultaneously signifies a rejection of God. The two ideas are thus combined in a single event.

In the last scene with Todd, the biblical and psychoanalytic allegories also overlap and produce an effect similar to the one described above. The scene provides an argument for the precise link between *overcoming* the Oedipal complex and abandoning faith. In terms of the psychoanalytic allegory, the scene seems to present a reconciliation between Todd and his stepfather because the former has agreed to go on the trip with Mark. In that scene, Todd meets another lonely young nameless boy, who parallels the one killed in the cave. The solemn parting with the nameless boy on the platform may be seen as a change of attitude to the (mental) "father". Looking out of the train window, "as they slid out of the station [Todd] saw the

<sup>7</sup> It is also characteristic that the nature of Todd's game is indefinite. When Todd comes alone to the cave, the boy tells him plainly that he played pirates with Carter and gangsters with Randy. But when Todd asks the boy, "And what game have I come to play?", the boy answers simply "I don't know" (White 1967: 201), as if refusing to classify it.

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that Randy's faith epitomizes the Freudian model of religion. Randy's obsessive religious practices correspond to Freud's concept of religion as a societal equivalent of individual "obsessional neurosis" (Freud qtd. in Chapman 2007: 28). Randy is, in fact, more or less neurotic. According to Freud, the ritual, both in neurosis and in religion, "defends against the expression of repressed instincts" (Chapman 2007: 28) and at the same time "displays the symbolic essence of the repressed instinct. Thus, the instinct achieves partial gratification" (Chapman 2007: 28). Randy, so long as he observes his rituals, is unsuccessful at seducing girls; it is only when he stops his religious practices that he engages in and completes sexual intercourse.

boy standing with his arm raised to him as if in salute, and he threw his own arm up and out in a gesture of recognition and farewell. They looked at each other, unsmiling and grave, as they drew rapidly apart" (White 1967: 252). Todd kills the first boy but parts peacefully with the other one. So far, the last scene would more or less go in line with Freud's views.

However, the same scene contains a strong potential for a different interpretation in terms of the biblical allegory. Todd and the boy on the platform talk about airplanes. Todd, who has already travelled by plane, says that a plane is "not half as interesting as a train", to which the boy replies, "all the same, I'd like to try it". Then Todd asks him if he "would [...] like to go to Italy" (White 1967: 249). The boy's response is, "not really [...] I suppose it's jolly interesting and all that, but what I'd like most would be the bit in the plane" (White 1967: 249-250). The airplane seems to be a symbol of faith: it is automatically associated with the sky, which, in turn, is allegorically associated with heaven. Imagining a plane trip is therefore like imagining heaven. The conversation about planes highlights a crucial difference between Todd and the boy on the platform: the former considers airplanes (heaven, religious speculation) boring while the latter is still fascinated by them. The farewell to the boy, then, can be read as a farewell to faith – or a farewell to childhood *and* faith. For the nameless boys (both of them), apart from being allegories of the Freudian "father" and of Christ,<sup>9</sup> may also be read as an allegory of childhood. At any rate, the last scene combines the resolution of the Oedipal complex (Todd's reconciliation with Mark Savory) with the end of faith (Todd's disagreement with the boy on the platform). Thus the solemn parting with the little boy could be both a reconciliation with the "father" and a farewell to faith.

The scene in which the three boys destroy a segment of a breakwater, like the scene of the farewell, seems to signify the disillusionment of the allegorical boy's religious experience. In this way, it indirectly substantiates the claim that *Quarry*

<sup>9</sup> If the boy on the platform is Christ-like, it is only because he parallels the killed boy.

reinterprets Freud's views on the Oedipus complex and religion.

Behind [the breakwater], through the gap where it had stood, stretched the revealed length of peaceful beach, identical with the one upon which they stood. It is indistinguishable, thought Todd, looking bleakly at it. They had broken through to it by means of this superb act of destruction, and it was simply the same; no better, and no worse. Somehow this distressed him greatly. His disappointment was irrational and acute. For the moment [...] he felt he would never recover from it. (White 1967: 138)

The disproportionate and irrational importance which Todd ascribes to this essentially simple act of vandalism invites an allegorical reading. The scene suggests that the allegorical boy's story stands for an unsuccessful search for the metaphysical truth. The damaging of the breakwater provides a parallel for the bullies' relationship with the nameless boy, especially the fruitless conversations they have with him and, of course, his murder. The hole in the breakwater, like the nameless boy's evasive answers, provides no illumination for the allegorical boy; it leaves him where he was. The parallel is all the closer because in both cases the allegorical boy wants to achieve something unspecified – knowledge, perhaps – through violence: demolishing the breakwater or confining (and killing) the nameless boy.<sup>10</sup>

## **6. Ambiguity of Quarry**

As was mentioned at the beginning, the novel is ambiguous rather than one-dimensional. It is no wonder because

---

<sup>10</sup> We have already hinted at the unspecified character of Todd's "individual" game. But the very idea of kidnapping a boy – its reason and purpose – is characterized by vagueness, too. After the first encounter with the nameless boy, when the victim has been left in the cave, Todd "lay quiet, waiting for [...] sleep, and thought of Carter, and Randy, and of the boy – and of his own reasons, which were deep, and tortuous, and inexplicable" (White 1967: 19).

it is most natural for literature if the ideological message of a work is inherent in its semantic structure, its stylistic shape and thematic composition. This kind of message is usually ambiguous and may be interpreted in various ways; hence any cohesive and disambiguating interpretation may lead to a considerable reduction of a work's ideological content, or even to its utter trivialization. (Sławiński 2002: 207, translation mine)

Besides, Uspienski points out that the ideological point of view "is the least accessible to formal analysis: if one tries to describe it, then using intuition is, to some extent, inevitable" (1997: 18, translation mine). The ambiguity of *Quarry* pertains to the problem of losing faith. If the murder of the nameless boy is interpreted as a rejection of faith, then it is unclear whether the phenomenon is presented as desirable or not. On the literal level, the atrocity of the boy's (as well as the girl's) death quite clearly exposes the three bullies as murderers. However, it does not quite resolve the ambiguity of the allegorical level, on which the deaths simply represent certain psychological – or spiritual – processes. The novel's ambivalence about the loss of faith results from a combination of biblical and Freudian allegory as well as from the novel's use of symbolism. The former source of ambiguity will be exemplified by the scene of chasing the girl; the latter source will be illustrated by analysing the meaning of rain in the final scenes, which is symbolic rather than allegorical.

The scene with the girl in the pink dress bears a considerable allegorical significance but it does not reveal a clear ideological point of view of the novel. It may be interpreted either in a biblical vein or in a more Freudian spirit. In biblical terms, the girl seems to stand for conscience: the boys chase her because they do not want her to denounce them. By analogy, the bullies want to suppress their conscience, which would otherwise remind them of the wickedness of what they do with the boy. The serpent-like boys, then, stand for yielding to temptation and for aversion to moral rules. However, this biblical framework does not exclude the perspective of Freud's psychoanalysis because the latter also includes the idea of original

sin, to which the scene alludes. Of course, Freud understood the idea in a radically different way. Original sin for Freud is the killing of the father, leader of the primal horde (cf. Freud 1913: 77). Viewed in this light, the chase represents no more than the suppression of sympathy, which is a preliminary to killing the “father” (the nameless boy). Whichever point of view we assume, though, it should be noted that the matter is further complicated by the fact that the nameless boy himself encourages the bullies to chase the girl: “I really do think you ought to go down – now, while she’s still there” (White 1967: 148).

The arrangement of the motifs of drought and rain does not make the ideological interpretation of *Quarry* easier, either. The majority of the plot is set in a period of dry weather; rain comes only after the nameless boy’s death, but then it persists. As has been said, the rain features in all the three last scenes, which show the three boys separately. The image of rain carries a considerable semantic potential. “Depending upon its level of intensity, rain may either serve as life-giving or life-destroying. It is revitalizing, fertilizing, and heavenly, and often marks acts of purification” (Protas 2001). Without going into details, the rain in the final scenes could symbolize several different ideas: a reward for the allegorical boy’s maturing; the sadness of his disillusionment; or the coming of God’s grace, of which the allegorical boy is heedless after losing faith (Carter and Randy are unaware of the rain; Todd seems to be indifferent to it).

## 7. Conclusion

The interpretation outlined here does not pretend to be exhaustive. One of the main points that I have tried to prove is that Jane White’s novel *Quarry* links the Oedipal conflict with the end of religious faith rather than with its origin. Arguably, the claim has been validated. But what conclusions should be drawn from that fact is a question which the present article leaves open. It is an open question, too, whether the allegorical

boy's loss of faith is anyone's fault, or a natural and inevitable process. One could also try to explain why the characters try to gain knowledge (?) through destruction. Yet another question for further research is how the ideas expressed in the novel are related to Jane White's real-life views and experiences, especially her approach to religion. Subsequent analyses may supplement or correct the interpretation proposed here. But whatever alternative interpretations arise, they must take into account the biblical and psychoanalytic frameworks outlined above: the presence, if not the full meaning, of these paradigms in Jane White's novel has been sufficiently substantiated.

## References

- "Allegory: Art and literature" (2017). *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Available at <<https://www.britannica.com/art/allegory-art-and-literature>>. Accessed 22 October 2017.
- Abramowska, Janina (2003). "Rehabilitacja alegorii". In: Janina Abramowska (ed.). *Alegoria*. Gdańsk: Słowo / obraz terytoria, 5-18.
- Chapman, Christopher N. (2007). *Freud, Religion, and Anxiety: How Freud's Critique of Religion Neglected His Advances in Psychoanalytic Theory*. Morrisville: Lulu.com. *Chapman's Bits: Musings about technology, philosophy, research... and wine*. Available at <[www.userphilosophy.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/chapman-freud-religion-anxiety-1443759.pdf](http://www.userphilosophy.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/chapman-freud-religion-anxiety-1443759.pdf)>. Accessed 21 June 2016.
- Cuddon, John Anthony (1982). *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. New York: Penguin.
- "Doppelganger" (2016). *LiteraryDevices.net*. Available at <<http://literarydevices.net/doppelganger/>>. Accessed 19 July 2016.
- Freud, Sigmund (1913). *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. Also available at <<http://www.sigmundfreud.net/totem-and-taboo-pdf-ebook.jsp>>. Accessed 25 July 2016.
- "From quarry to garden" (2011). In: *Sanctuary: Holy Sepulchre*. Custodia Terrae Sanctae: Franciscan missionaries serving the Holy Land. Available at <<http://www.sepulchre.custodia.org/default>>.

- asp?id=4075>. Accessed 20 October 2016.
- “Jane White” (2008). *The Neglected Books Page*. Available at <[neglectedbooks.com/?p=235](http://neglectedbooks.com/?p=235)>. Accessed 20 June 2016.
- Miller, Michael Craig (2016). “Unconscious or subconscious?” *Harvard Health Blog*. Harvard Health Publications. Harvard Medical School. Available at <<http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/unconscious-or-subconscious-20100801255>>. Accessed 1 July 2016.
- Nedelkoff, Robert (2008). Comment on “Jane White”. *The Neglected Books Page*. Available at <[neglectedbooks.com/?p=235](http://neglectedbooks.com/?p=235)>. Accessed 10 September 2016.
- Okopień-Sławińska, Aleksandra (2002). “Alegoria”. In: Janusz Sławiński (ed.). *Słownik terminów literackich*. Wrocław: Osso-lineum, 23-25.
- Protas, Allison, et al. (2001). *Dictionary of Symbolism*. University of Michigan. Available at <<http://www.umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html>>. Accessed 25 July 2016.
- Sławiński, Janusz (2002). “Ideologia w dziele literackim”. In: Janusz Sławiński (ed.). *Słownik terminów literackich*. Wrocław: Osso-lineum, 207-208.
- “The archeological excavations” (2011). *Sanctuary: Holy Sepulchre*. Custodia Terrae Sanctae: Franciscan Missionaries Serving the Holy Land. Available at <<http://www.sepulchre.custodia.org/default.asp?id=4096>>. Accessed: 20 October 2016.
- The Bible: Authorized King James Version*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode.
- Uspienski, Boris (1997). *Poetyka kompozycji. Struktura tekstu artystycznego i typologia form kompozycji*. Trans. Piotr Fast. Katowice: Śląsk.
- White, Jane (1968). *Beatrice, Falling*. London: Michael Joseph.
- White, Jane (1967). *Quarry*. London: Michael Joseph.

Karol Chojnowski  
Filologiczne Studia Doktoranckie  
Uniwersytet Gdańskiego  
Wita Stwosza 51  
80-308 Gdańsk  
Poland  
[karol.chojnowski@o2.pl](mailto:karochojnowski@o2.pl)



**Female verticality, male horizontality:  
On genderized spaces and unequal border  
crossings in the prose of Kate Chopin  
and Charlotte Perkins Gilman**

MONIKA DACA

*Received 3.05.2017,  
accepted 9.11.2017.*

**Abstract**

The aim of the present article is to analyze the notion of the border, as well as the significance of genderized spaces and movements along vertical and horizontal axes in two literary texts of American proto-feminism: Kate Chopin's short story "The Dream of an Hour" and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopian novel *Herland*. The theoretical framework of the analysis is based on Yuri Lotman's concept of semiosphere. The paper investigates the genderized spaces of the two narratives, showing that the internal semiospheres are assigned to female characters, while the outer spaces are typically male, and explaining the significance of this distribution. The axiological value of vertical and horizontal movements performed by the characters is also discussed. Furthermore, the article attempts to analyze the separating and translational qualities of borders in the two texts, taking cognizance of the peculiarity of the utopian boundary. An argument is made that unlike the male messages, female signals are subjects to unsuccessful translations at the borders of the semiospheres. It is argued that both literary works employ similar narrative devices which utilize spatial elements to highlight the importance of the female components of the texts.

## **Key words**

border, horizontality, movement, semiosphere, utopia, verticality

# **„Wertykalna” kobiecość i „horyzontalna” męskość: o genderowym nacechowaniu przestrzeni i braku równouprawnienia w przekraczaniu granic w prozie Kate Chopin i Charlotte Perkins Gilman**

## **Abstrakt**

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza kategorii granicy oraz znamionowania przestrzeni przyporządkowanej płciom i ruchów wzduż osi pionowej i poziomej w dwóch dziełach amerykańskiego protofeminizmu: opowiadaniu Kate Chopin pt. „The Dream of an Hour” oraz utopijnej powieści Charlotte Perkins Gilman pt. *Herland*. Ramy teoretyczne analizy stanowi opracowana przez Jurija Łotmana kategoria semiosfery. Artykuł zawiera omówienie przestrzeni w obu tekstach, wykazujące, że semiosfery wewnętrzne przyporządkowane są postaciom kobiecym, natomiast przestrzenie zewnętrzne są jednoznacznie męskie. W pracy wyjaśniono wagę takiego przyporządkowania. Omówiono także aksjologiczne znaczenie poziomych i pionowych ruchów wykonywanych przez bohaterów tekstów. Ponadto praca analizuje rozdzielaające oraz translacyjne właściwości granic w obu tekstach, biorąc pod uwagę szczególne własności granicy utopijnej. W toku analizy dowodzi się, że w przeciwieństwie do męskich komunikatów, sygnałom kobiecym nie udaje się przedostać przez translacyjne granice między semiosferami. Artykuł stawia tezę, że obydwa omawiane dzieła literackie wykorzystują podobne narzędzia narracyjne, stosując kategorie przestrzenne świata przedstawionego do podkreślenia wagi kobieczych elementów w tekstach.

## **Słowa kluczowe**

granica, wertykalność, horyzontalność, ruch, semiosfera, utopia

## 1. Introduction

In both academic and lay discussions of narratives, the inseparable pair of space and time is virtually omnipresent. Although the dyad tends to be treated in an imbalanced way, i.e. with time (sequence of events, progression) foregrounded at the expense of space, spatial components are indispensable for all narratives: even if no direct spatial information is provided, a certain spatial extension of the story world is implied (Ryan 2012: 1). In the analysis of space in literary works, the theory developed by Yuri Lotman proves immensely useful. In 1982, Lotman introduced the concept of semiosphere to address the problematic relation of space and semiosis:

Semiosphere is the semiotic space, outside of which semiosis cannot exist. The ensemble of semiotic formations functionally precedes the singular isolated language and becomes a condition for the existence of the latter. Without the semiosphere, language not only does not function, it does not exist. The division between the core and the periphery is a law of the internal organisation of the semiosphere. [There is a] boundary between the semiosphere and the non- or extra-semiotic space that surrounds it. The semiotic border is represented by the sum of bilingual translatable “filters”, passing through which the text is translated into another language (or languages), situated outside the given semiosphere. (Lotman 2005: 205)

On the basis of Lotman's theory, literary texts can be divided into a number of semiospheres in which various utterances and messages may have different meanings. The differences of signification between semiospheres, as well as the existence of filtering and translational borders, are crucial in the present analysis of two American proto-feminist narratives: Kate Chopin's short story “The Dream of an Hour” (1894) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's novel *Herland* (1915).

Chopin's short story describes a dramatic 60 minutes. A young woman, Mrs. Mallard, is visited by her husband's friend Richard, who brings terrible news of a railway accident

in which Mr. Mallard is thought to have died. The woman, supposedly distraught with grief, goes upstairs, to her bedroom, where she contemplates the view from the window while trying to absorb and understand the fact of her sudden widowhood. It soon becomes clear that contrary to our expectations and to her own surprise and terror, the protagonist begins to feel greatly relieved, as her marriage was not particularly happy. Her husband's death enables her instantly to rediscover her freedom and self-confidence. She seems pleased with the fact that from now on she will be the only person to decide about her life: "There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature" (Chopin 2015: 122). After the moment of illumination and joy, tamed slightly by remorse, the widow composes herself and, along with her sister, goes back downstairs. When the husband – very much alive and totally unaware of the train accident – opens the front door, the woman collapses. In the ironic ending of the story, the doctors interpret her death as being caused by the "joy that kills" (Chopin 2015: 123).

Gilman's *Herland* is a utopian novel narrated by a male traveller who, along with two of his friends, explores a hidden country inhabited solely by women. Deeply rooted stereotypes and prejudices make it immensely difficult for the travellers to understand the rules governing the wonderfully organized female state. The three male protagonists do reach a certain level of understanding, even though one of them does not change his original belief in the profound superiority of men.

Undoubtedly, these two literary works vary in numerous aspects, such as genre, length, and style. Nevertheless, certain narrative devices and elements of the structure of the stories are surprisingly similar in *Herland* and "The Dream of an Hour". The concurrent constituents of both works are connected with genderized narrative spaces and movements across

particular semiospheres. As these elements of the texts' structures are inextricably tied to boundaries, the notion of the border will prove useful in further analysis.

## **2. Genderized inner and outer spaces**

Lotman observes that the language of spatial relations is crucial in human comprehension of reality, and the binary oppositions of "up-down", "right-left", "near-far" etc. are frequently used to construct cultural models which associate particular elements with such non-spatial values as "good-bad", "valuable-not valuable", "one's own-another's" (Lotman 1990: 218). The primitive divisions into worlds known and unknown, sacred and profane, are based on identifying certain spaces with axiological qualities. According to Ryan, these basic dichotomies are realized in literary works by attributing symbolic meanings to various places and regions of the narrative worlds, hence creating "a symbolic geography diversified into regions where different events and experiences take place – where life, in other words, is governed by different physical, psychological, social or cultural rules" (Ryan 2012: 9). In the discussed works, this mapping is connected with assigning particular semiospheres to genders.

In "The Dream of an Hour", the whole action takes place in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Mallard. Due to the extreme brevity of the story, the building is not described, but it is signalled that it is a standard upper-class house located on the town square. The rest of the story space comprises the streets and ill-fated railroad – these locations, though, are only mentioned, mapped by the characters' utterances and thoughts, while the immediate surroundings of the actual events do not extend beyond the walls of the house. This disproportion in the narrative significance of the inside and the outside is crucial in the story. The internal semiosphere, safely separated from the external world by the four walls of the house and the locked door, is characterized by its female nature, whereas the outside is clearly male. Mrs. Mallard and her sister occupy the

domestic space of the house, never physically leaving it within the duration of the story. Both Mr. Mallard and his friend Richard enter the domestic space from the outside, as if they belonged to the outer world. What seems important is that once they cross the boundary between the outer and inner worlds, they shatter the domestic peace and quiet by bringing bad news, tragedy and pain.

Indeed, assigning women to domestic spaces and men to public spaces is far from surprising, as it reflects the realities of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century American South, the traditional setting of Chopin's stories. However, this division is not only a marker of the plausibility of the narrative; it also serves as a medium of the feminist message. The female space, being the immediate location of the action where a vital psychological transformation of the protagonist occurs, is located in the center, while the male world occupies the periphery. Thus, this demarcation, emphasizing the importance of the female, constitutes a strong manifesto in the patriarchal sociocultural setting that traditionally associated men with centrality and women with secondariness. The main boundary, constituted in Chopin's short story by the house walls, divides the whole space of signs into two semiospheres where various gestures, words and cries are assigned different meanings.

A similar message is indeed conveyed in *Herland*. The narrative space of the novel is clearly divided into the utopian land and the outer world, which is a distinction typical for virtually all early utopian texts. The notion of the utopian border will be elaborated upon later in the discussion. For now, it is worth noting that in Gilman's work the barrier is not merely a genre-specific element. The opposition of "us" and "them", "inside" and "outside", is simultaneously the distinction between the female and the male. The feminine interior semiosphere is obviously not as restricted as in Chopin's story, as it encompasses not a single building, but a huge plateau with cities inhabited by the nation of women and large stretches of rainforests. However, it is clear that also in this case the out-

side is a male-dominated space – as signalled not only by the fact that the only men in the narrative, the three travellers, come from the outer world, but even more by the ideas that these protagonists carry with them. Van, Terry and Jeff enter the isolated country – the female semiosphere – with a strong belief in the superiority of men and a conviction of the impossibility that women alone could develop a highly organized culture and civilization. Moreover, their original patriarchal, adventurous mindset, with its inclination to rivalry and competition, is contrasted with the equality, solidarity and cooperation cherished by Herland's inhabitants. In other words, the female character of the inside and the male nature of the outside is presented on two levels: by the physical gender of the characters representing the two spheres of the narrative space, and by the values and psychological stances expressed by the characters. The boundary as represented in the novel keeps these two worlds and two sets of values apart.

### **3. Movements along vertical and horizontal axes**

As has already been indicated, in both works the division into female internal space and male external space necessitates narrative movements between the two spheres. According to Lotman, a given work's plot always stems from the primary event in which a literary character crosses the border between two symbolically charged spaces of the narrative (Lotman 1977: 238). Indeed, in the course of the narrative's progress, the characters of Chopin's short story and Gilman's novel cross the boundaries between the male and female semiospheres, which is crucial for conveying the central messages of the texts. Furthermore, the movements which take place within the internal, female semiospheres are also highly significant.

Crossing the borders between the semiospheres in both texts involves horizontal movements, passing the “in–out” boundary. In Chopin's story as well as in Gilman's novel, this horizontal motion is assigned to male characters. Only one

woman out of the countless inhabitants of Herland, Ellador, crosses the border, as she travels with the narrator, her husband, to explore the outer world at the very end of the novel. Apart from that one character, however, no woman ever ventures to leave the internal semiosphere. Interestingly, the men enter the mysterious land of women using a biplane, hence it can be argued that they rely on the vertical movement. Nevertheless, the flight's sole purpose is to get inside the hidden country, to overcome the natural barrier of the high plateau, therefore it is the direction "to", "into", that matters to them. The plain's height actually only reinforces the association of the vertical with the female, as it is the women's land that is so elevated. Furthermore, in his descriptions of Herland, the narrator repeatedly emphasizes the loftiness of public buildings, castles and fortresses, as well as the impressive height of trees and even the tallness of the country's inhabitants. Another realization of female verticality in the novel is offered by the introduction of the very first women that the travellers meet after landing. They notice three girls watching them from a branch of a tree, and as soon as they start climbing towards the curious observers, it becomes clear that they cannot compete with these swift young women in the upward pursuit. The female characters, then, are immediately contrasted with the men by means of the distinction in the types of movements they perform.

Chopin's story, due to its brevity, presents the same phenomenon in an even more evident, condensed form. The two male characters of the narrative enter the house through the front door, which is clearly a horizontal movement. By contrast, the two women, and especially the protagonist, Mrs. Mallard, constantly move up and down. Verticality is evident in such movements as going upstairs and downstairs, sitting down and standing up, kneeling and rising to one's feet, etc. While the young widow looks out of the window, simultaneously undergoing a psychological transformation, not only does she cast her eyes from the street below to the skies above, but

she also breathes so heavily that her bosom rises and falls tumultuously. All of these actions reflect the symbolic ascension of the woman, her soaring sense of freedom, autonomy and happiness.

Undeniably, the connection of the female with the vertical and the male with the horizontal is of great thematic importance, as it contributes to the feminist overtone of the two works. From the axiological viewpoint, vertical movements are always favoured above horizontal ones, because the opposition of up and down, universal for all cultures, is frequently interpreted in moral, religious, social and political terms (Lotman 1990: 132). In literary works, upward movement cannot be fully separated from associations with such concepts as sublimity, growth, enhancement and development.

#### **4. Separating, filtering and translational qualities of borders**

As shown above, borders are easily noticeable in the two texts. Being an ambivalent concept, the border both separates and unites the two semiospheres, which means that apart from emphasizing the disparateness of the worlds it divides, the boundary serves as a mechanism of translation (Lotman 1990: 136). This filtering membrane enables representatives of both worlds to receive foreign messages and incorporate them into their languages, worldviews and semiotics. However, such translations may not always be particularly successful. The separating, filtering and translational qualities of boundaries perform a similar function in Gilman's novel and Chopin's story.

Being a traditionally structured utopian text, *Herland* contains the notion of the utopian boundary. The utopian border is an especially marked type of border in literary worlds, as it is usually clear-cut and almost always virtually impenetrable. Most early utopian texts begin with geographical descriptions of natural barriers, such as bodies of water, mountain ranges or strips of wilderness, which separate the utopian land from

the rest of the world (Blaim 2013: 136-7). The textual function of the boundary is connected here with reinforcing the notion of significant difference between the internal and external spaces. The internal, idealized land is remote and inaccessible, which is of axiological significance: “The traditional opposition of heaven and earth involving the vertical opposition ‘top-bottom’ is reinterpreted as the horizontal opposition ‘near-far’” (Blaim 2013: 135). Interestingly, the natural barrier of Herland is the plateau, hence the idea of separateness and superiority is not only expressed by the country’s horizontal remoteness, but also reinforced by its vertical location. Moreover, the border in *Herland* additionally protects the female internal semiosphere from the outer world occupied by numerous patriarchal societies. The female utopia can exist solely due to its inaccessibility, hence when the three men penetrate the border, they constitute a threat to the utopian state. Furthermore, the division into “us” and “them”, which lays the ground for every culture (Lotman 1990: 131), is particularly important in conveying utopian ideas, and therefore the border has an even greater potential for semiotization in all utopian texts.

It should be noted that during virtually the whole action of *Herland*, all of the characters, including the three male explorers, physically reside in the female, internal semiosphere. However, due to their prejudices and mental limitations, the men in fact hardly leave the outer world – it is as if they carry it with themselves wherever they go, even to the country of women. In consequence, they are unable to understand the workings of the utopian state – at least at the beginning of their stay in Herland, hence the unsuccessful translation of the female messages, which takes place at the border of the two worlds. There are multiple examples of such misunderstandings, and they extend from very basic difficulties, such as the initial unfamiliarity with the women’s language, to quite complex and ideologically based ones. The first-person narrator describes his friend’s problems with comprehending the unity of the female nation in this way: “I remember how long

Terry balked at the evident unanimity of these women – the most conspicuous feature of their whole culture. “It’s impossible!” he would insist. ‘Women cannot cooperate – it’s against nature” (Perkins Gilman 2015: 207). Moreover, the men could not understand the concept of motherhood which constituted the foundation of the utopian society:

You see, they were Mothers, not in our sense of helpless involuntary fecundity, forced to fill and overfill the land, every land, and then see their children suffer, sin, and die, fighting horribly with one another; but in the sense of Conscious Makers of People. Mother-love with them was not a brute passion, a mere ‘instinct,’ a wholly personal feeling; it was – a religion. It included that limitless feeling of sisterhood, that wide unity in service, which was so difficult for us to grasp. And it was National, Racial, Human – oh, I don’t know how to say it. (Perkins Gilman 2015: 207)

The honesty with which the narrator admits his own incapacity to understand this notion is indeed a sign of his willingness to learn more about this culture. Towards the end of the narrative, two of the three friends become convinced of the immense advantages of Herland’s structure, values and functioning, but it still seems impossible for them to reach a really profound understanding of it.

By contrast, messages brought to Herland from the outside are subject to successful translations, because the women pay close attention to what the travellers describe, they comprehend and acknowledge the mechanisms of the outer societies, despite being far from accepting or approving them. They undoubtedly wish to benefit from knowing a different culture, to draw on the men’s knowledge and experience in order to enhance their own society. When confronted by Terry as to the purpose of holding the men in pleasant and respectful captivity, his guardian-teacher Moadine explains: “We are trying to learn of you all we can, and to teach you what you are willing to learn of our country” (Perkins Gilman 2015: 205).

Translations of male and female signals can also be found in “The Dream of an Hour”, although they are not manifested in such a straightforward way as in *Herland*. The border in the story is obviously designated by the walls of the house, and the front door serves as the major pore of the membrane, enabling messages to be transferred between the internal female and external male semiospheres. The two male characters, Richard and Mr. Mallard, enter through the door, each presenting a different kind of tragedy for the protagonist: firstly, the news of the fatal accident, secondly – the denial of this information. Each time the male message, coming from the outside, is acknowledged and understood by Mrs. Mallard, producing a great sense of triumph and a shattering disappointment, respectively. However, the female signals seem to be untransferable to the outer world. The first female message – the alleged widow’s happiness stemming from her newly regained freedom – is taken for despair and death-wish, and the protagonist does not have a chance to rectify this mistranslation. The second signal, the grief and disillusionment caused by her husband’s reappearance and by losing the scarcely retrieved independence, is in fact expressed by the woman’s sudden death. Unfortunately, the translation of this message is grossly unsuccessful: in the male semiosphere, represented by the doctors, her heart attack is perceived as having been caused by extreme joy brought about by her husband’s happy return.

## 5. Conclusion

In both works, it is at the borders that the differences between the female and male semiospheres manifest themselves most noticeably, hence the major events which propel the narration take place around those boundaries. Necessarily, then, the main characters occupy the vicinity of the boundaries, which makes them prone to suffer from the dangers of liminality: in a way, they always remain on the edge. In the case of “The Dream on an Hour”, all the characters are on the verge sepa-

rating life from death. In *Herland*, the brink is substantially less dramatic: the representatives of the two semiospheres balance here on the verge of understanding and appreciating the other culture. Ultimately, though, the liminal oscillations of both analyzed texts are concerned with gender differences. The distinction between the female internal and male external semiospheres, along with the genderized types of movements and the translational functioning of the borders, contributes to the general feminist overtone of both works, emphasizing the narrative significance and thematic prominence of the female elements.

## References

- Blaim, Artur (2013). *Gazing in Useless Wonder: English Utopian Fictions, 1516–1800*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Chopin, Kate (2015). “The Dream of an Hour”. In: *Kate Chopin: The Dover Reader*. Mineola: Dover Publications, 121-123.
- Lotman, Juri (2005). “On the semiosphere”. *Sign Systems Studies* 33/1: 205-229.
- Lotman, Yuri M. (1990). *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Trans. Ann Shukman. London: Tauris.
- Lotman, Jurij (1977). *The Structure of the Artistic Text*. Trans. Gail Lenhoff, Ronald Vroon. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Perkins Gilman, Charlotte (2015). *Herland*. In: *The Collected Works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Oxford: Benediction Classics, 157-265.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure (2012). “Space”. In: Peter Hühn et al. (eds.). *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University Press. Available at <<http://hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php?title=Space&oldid=1708>>. Accessed 20 April 2012.

Monika Daca  
Filologiczne Studia Doktoranckie  
Uniwersytet Gdańskie  
Wita Stwosza 51  
80-308 Gdańsk  
Poland  
[monika.zanko@gmail.com](mailto:monika.zanko@gmail.com)

## **The significance of the frontier in the evolution of the Western genre**

ANNA DULSKA

*Received 3.05.2017,  
received in revised form 22.10.2017,  
accepted 9.11.2017.*

### **Abstract**

The aim of the paper is to show the pivotal role of the American West in the evolution of the Western genre. The West is understood here not only as the uncharted area lying west of the Mississippi river but, above all, as a mythical place, which is how it came to be represented in Western fiction. The paper commences with an examination of the Frontier Thesis, aimed at illustrating the symbolic meaning of the Frontier and the West; and then proceeds to discuss precursors of the genre. Next, *The Virginian* is presented as the first American Western, and it is demonstrated that its key characteristics correspond to the basic premises of the Frontier thesis. The paper then follows the evolution of the Western in the 20th century, arguing that transformations in the formula since the 1960s reflect a new, revisionist treatment of the myth of the West.

### **Key words**

American West, frontier, Frontier Thesis, myth of the West, Western genre

## Znaczenie granicy w ewolucji westernu

### Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie kluczowej roli amerykańskiego Zachodu w ewolucji gatunku westernu. Zachód jest tu rozumiany nie tylko jako niezbadany obszar rozciągający się na zachód od rzeki Missisipi, ale przede wszystkim jako mityczna kraina, gdyż tak właśnie przyjęło się przedstawiać ten region w literaturze typu western. Artykuł rozpoczyna się od analizy teorii pogranicza, mającej na celu objaśnienie symbolicznego znaczenia Zachodu. Następnie pokrótkę omówiono pozycje, które wniosły wkład w rozwój westernu oraz poddano analizie powieść Owena Wistera pt. *Wirgińczyk: Jeździec z Równin*, która jest powszechnie uznawana za pierwszy western w literaturze amerykańskiej. Wykazano, że podstawowe cechy gatunku są powiązane z założeniami teorii pogranicza. Ponadto omówiono transformację westernu w XX wieku, uzasadniając tezę, że przekształcenia gatunku od lat 60-tych odzwierciedlały nowe, rewizjonistyczne podejście do mitu Zachodu.

### Słowa kluczowe

amerykański Zachód, granica, mit Zachodu, western

### 1. Introduction

The early Pilgrim settlers who arrived in the New World in 1620 regarded the huge stretches of land they encountered as a gift from God (Bremer 1995: 32), upon which they were bound by the covenant to establish an ideal Christian society, “a city upon a hill” (Winthrop 1630: 9-10), which would set an example for the whole world (Bremer 1995: 43-44; 89-90; Gray 2004: 35). Since the first settlers founded colonies in the east, the conquest advanced westwards, before long resulting in the emergence of numerous adventure stories revolving around life on the Frontier – the edge of the colonized land beyond which lay uncharted territory. These stories, along with colonial folk

music, Indian captivity narratives, Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* as well as local color literature, are predecessors of the modern Western (Schatz 1992: 431), which became recognized as a genre of fiction in its own right at the beginning of the twentieth century (Cawelti 1999: 57). The Western is therefore the literary outcome of a nearly three-century-long westward expansion. However, instead of serving as a reliable source of information about the conquest, it departs from historical truth in favor of a myth of the West, which glorifies the colonial past.

The aim of this paper is to explore the interconnection between the myth of the West and the vision of the West conjured up by Western novels. Beginning from an analysis of the Frontier Thesis, the paper traces the key elements of the myth of the American West, which are subsequently juxtaposed with the main characteristics of the Western in Owen Wister's novel *The Virginian*. In addition to this, the paper investigates the extent to which American mythology is reflected in this classic representative of the genre. The changes in the formula of the Western are also analyzed so as to determine the correlation between the decline in the popularity of the genre and demythologization of the West in the second half of the 20th century.

## **2. The Frontier Thesis**

In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his monumental essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", in which he scrutinized the impact of westward expansion on the molding of American national identity. Contrary to the long-standing belief at the time that American culture originated from the civilization of the Old World, Turner asserted that it was the presence of the frontier that led to the formation of a new, distinct nation (McVeigh 2007: 1-2). According to Turner, the frontier experience forced settlers to break away from the influence of Europe by returning them to a primitive

state in which they could undergo spiritual regeneration, adapt to a new physical environment, and finally be able to recommence their lives as true Americans:

The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization (...) Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe [...]. The fact is, that here is a new product that is American. (1893: 3-4)

Such a remarkable transformation was possible due to the fact that the nature of the American frontier, referred to as “the edge of free land”, was markedly different from European frontiers, defined by Turner as “a fortified boundary line running through dense populations” (1893: 3). What was considered as free land in the West, as juxtaposed with the enclosed, densely-populated Old World, ensured for Europeans an equality of opportunities regardless of their financial status, providing favorable conditions for the evolution of democracy, the promotion of a feeling of national unity, and the fostering of the values of equality, individualism as well as freedom, all of which lie at the core of American national identity (Kowalczyk-Twarowski and Pyzik 10-11; Zachara 2009: 249-250). In Turner’s words, the frontier “carried with it individualism, democracy, and nationalism” (1893: 35) and the democracy on the new continent “was strong in selfishness and individualism, intolerant of administrative experience and education and pressing individual liberty” (1893: 32). Finally, Turner also believed that the frontier experience instilled unique traits of character in Americans, such as toughness, determination, self-confidence, optimism and enterprise, permanently setting them apart from other nations (McVeigh 2007: 24).

Turner’s thesis recapitulates the myth of the Frontier, dating back to the arrival of the first Puritan settlers (Stevens

1997: par. 2), who saw the new continent as the promised land. Although in the course of time many Puritan doctrines lost their vital force, the myth continued to gain strength (Kowalczyk-Twarowski and Pyzik 2004: 9-10). For Turner, the concept of the American West is closely connected with that of the frontier, since “each frontier leaves its traces behind it, and when it becomes a settled area the region still partakes of the frontier characteristics” (1893: 4). Thus, it transpires that the West is permeated with the same exceptional attributes as the mythical Frontier, becoming the embodiment of the promised land, where anything can be achieved by moral strength, determination and hard work. These extraordinary qualities of the West are perpetuated in classic Western fiction, which contributed to misconceived notions about daily life on the Frontier. As Richard Slotkin puts it, for the majority of Americans

the West became a landscape known through, and completely identified with, the fictions created around it [...] The fictive or mythic West became the scene in which new acts of mythogenesis would occur – in effect displacing the real contemporary region and the historical Frontier (1998: 61-62).

For the purposes of this paper, analysis of “the fictions” is narrowed down, focusing primarily on classic Western literature and its subsequent modifications in the 20th century. However, it should be noted that over the centuries the myth of the West has been exploited and deconstructed by a multitude of American as well as non-American writers, poets, playwrights, scriptwriters, film directors, politicians and many others, which corroborates its enduring appeal.

### **3. The first Western and its predecessors**

Published in 1902, Owen Wister’s *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains* is widely cited as the first literary exponent of the modern Western genre (Cawelti 1977: 219). An instant best-seller (McVeigh 2007: 40), the novel established the staple

characteristics of the genre. Wister's key to success lay in an effective combination of themes and ideologies that had been developed in the Western fiction of the previous decades (Cawelti 1999: 68). In this respect, he was particularly indebted to James Fenimore Cooper, whose *Leatherstocking Tales* set the archetypal pattern of the adventure story (Cawelti 1977: 192), introduced the prototype for the Western hero (Cawelti 1977: 194), and, perhaps most significantly, explored the complex dialectic between the forces of civilization advancing from the east and the magnificent yet hazardous nature of the west (Cawelti 1977: 195). Along with Cooper's saga, the contemporary Western seems to have been influenced by dime novels, which began to be published in 1860 (McVeigh 2007: 39). However, these immensely popular stories, filled with unprecedented adventures in the West, failed to match Cooper's saga in terms of thematic complexity (Topping, Frazier and Peck 2010: par. 2), reducing the dichotomy between the values of civilization and nature into a moral opposition of good and evil, embodied by white pioneers and "savage" Indians, respectively (Cawelti 1977: 209). Nonetheless, dime novels represented a shift from Cooper's frontier backwoodsman towards the figure of an idealized masculine cowboy hero, epitomized by Wister's Virginian (Lusted 2014: 48). Last but not least, the local color movement of the 19th century also appears to have exerted a considerable impact on the modern Western (McVeigh 2007: 41). Local colorists, including Bret Harte, Mark Twain and Stephen Crane, added elements of humor and nostalgia to the genre, which were subsequently taken over by Wister (Cawelti 1977: 219). Furthermore, they depicted a new social hierarchy in the West, which evolved as a result of the absence of intricate eastern social institutions (McVeigh 2007: 42), transforming Cooper's opposition between civilization and nature into a cultural conflict between the non-institutionalized West and the civilized East (Cawelti 1997: 66-67).

#### **4. The characteristics of the Western**

The first genuine American Western starts with a scene in which the eastern narrator disembarks from a train in Medicine Bow, Wyoming, from where he is about to be escorted to a remote ranch by one of the cowboys working there, later referred to as the Virginian. Standing forlorn at the railway station, the narrator watches the departure of his eastbound train heading “to the far shores of civilization” (1902: 2). During the journey to the ranch, he dismisses western towns as provincial, shapeless and squalid, yet is quick to perceive the striking beauty of the western landscape, which clearly distinguishes it from the eastern parts of the country:

Yet this wretched husk of squalor spent thought upon appearances; many houses in it wore a false front to seem as if they were two stories high. There they stood, rearing their pitiful masquerade amid a fringe of old tin cans, while at their very doors began a world of crystal light, a land without end, a space across which Noah and Adam might come straight from Genesis. (4)

Elsewhere in the novel, the West is described by the narrator as “indefinite and mystic far” (99) “quiet, open, splendid wilderness” (14) and “land of equality” (17). Thus, imbued with transcendent values, Wister’s West offers spiritual regeneration through the return to a simpler manner of living and close contact with nature, both of which have been lost in the civilized East (Cawelti 1977: 221). However, the West is not a place without perils, which come in the form of dangerous animals, Indians and criminals. Therefore, it is also a testing ground for all newcomers, promoting qualities such as toughness, individualism and self-confidence, which are indispensable for survival in the harsh circumstances of frontier life (Cawelti 1977: 225; Etulain 1996: 9).

What is more, the West is depicted as a land of infinite opportunities, in which neither a lack of aristocratic heritage nor poor education stands in the way of success, which is deter-

mined by one's inner worth and hard work (Slotkin 1998: 175-176). This is the reason why the Virginian, representing a self-made man, becomes a successful rancher at the end of the novel. The democratizing effects of the West may be further substantiated by the Virginian's marriage to Molly, who, unlike the cowboy, is a well-educated member of an aristocratic family.

By introducing a romance between the Virginian and Molly Wood, Wister found yet another channel to explore the dichotomy between the West and the East. Whereas the Virginian embodies the free spirit of the West, Molly symbolizes domesticity and constraints on the hero's freedom, characteristic of the East (Cawelti 1977: 222-223; McVeigh 2007: 45). It seems that the marriage of the two as well as the Virginian's promotion to a ranch foreman bring about the resolution of the conflict in favor of superior western values (Lusted 2014: 47).

Another theme crucial to Wister's novel is redemptive violence, which is perpetrated by the hero in an attempt to purge evil from the community. Due to the inefficacy of the courts in Wyoming, the Virginian is forced to take the law into his own hands. Consequently, the punishment of rustlers is administered through vigilante justice, including a hanging and a gunfight. Although these acts are regarded as illegal in the civilized East, they are condoned in the West, since both of them are aimed at bringing justice to the community (Cawelti 1977: 221; Slotkin 1998: 180-181).

Finally, Wister's central protagonist establishes the image of the masculine Western cowboy hero in popular culture (Topping, Frazier and Peck 2010: para 5). Described as a "slim young giant, more beautiful than pictures" (1), the Virginian is renowned for his strength, cowboy skills, gentlemanliness to women, sharp wit, intelligence as well as inclination to practical jokes. Yet, his most remarkable characteristic is his strict adherence to the code of the West, which entails courage, honor, loyalty, keeping one's word and defending justice, even in the face of death (Cawelti 197: 222-223; McVeigh 2007: 45-

46). This moral code appears to govern all of the Virginian's decisions, but is perhaps most noticeable in the scene in which Molly, fearing for the cowboy's life, tries to convince him to flee the town rather than confront Trampas in a gun duel. Reluctant to break the code, the Virginian rejects Molly's request to save his own life, stating that: "I am goin' my own course, [...] Can't you see how it must be about a man? It's not for their benefit, friends or enemies, that I have got this thing to do" (126). In a shoot-out just after sunset, which has since become the classic denouement of the genre, the Virginian triumphs over his antagonist, restoring order to the community.

## **5. *The Virginian* and the Frontier Thesis**

Having determined the key constituents of the genre, it now becomes possible to examine the similarities between *The Virginian* and the Frontier Thesis. When analyzing the novel, Richard W. Etulain notes that "the parallels between *The Virginian* and Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis are illuminating. Much of what the Wisconsin historian asserted in his path-breaking essay [...] is central to Wister's novel" (1996: 9). Indeed, it appears that several essential ingredients of the novel bear a strong resemblance to the frontier thesis articulated by Turner.

First of all, the central protagonist of Wister's novel epitomizes a number of distinctive traits of character resulting from the process that Turner defines as "Americanization". Demonstrating his valiance, toughness and perseverance in the most challenging conditions, the Virginian may be likened to early settlers, who brought their civilization to the areas they conquered. In addition, it could be stated that the Virginian's story of success upholds the myth of the West as a land where anything is possible.

Secondly, Wister follows Turner in depicting the West as a land of invigorating qualities, where one can undergo spiritual purification and rediscover the most important values of

human life. Sharply contrasted with the hierarchical East, the West functions as a space of freedom, equality and democracy. Wister's belief in equal opportunities for all men in the West may be perhaps summarized by quoting an excerpt of *The Virginian* which contains the following reflections on democracy by the narrator:

It was through the Declaration of Independence that we Americans acknowledged the *eternal inequality* of man. For by it we abolished a cut-and-dried aristocracy. [...] By this very decree we acknowledged and gave freedom to true aristocracy, saying, "Let the best man win, whoever he is." Let the best man win! That is America's word. That is true democracy. And true democracy and true aristocracy are one and the same thing. (38)

Hence, in the American West, membership of the aristocracy is not through birth, but determined solely by the display of one's inner worth and hard work (Cawelti 1977: 227).

Thirdly, despite their strong beliefs in democracy, neither Wister nor Turner appear to harbor any interest in the plight of indigenous tribes of the country or slave labor (Etulain 1996: 10; Slotkin 1998: 55). On the contrary, the theme of violence committed in the process of westward expansion is largely absent in their works, giving way to a mythologized vision of American history. In Wister's novel, frontier violence is replaced by the concept of redemptive violence, considered to be an effective means of meting out punishment for crimes and reinstating justice. In addition, the women's roles in *The Virginian* are marginalized and stereotyped. Jane Tompkins, for instance, states that Western fiction displays animosity towards women's words, portraying female characters as inferior to reticent, masculine western heroes (1992: 62-63). A similar observation is made by Slotkin, who notes that Molly's relationship with the Virginian flourishes only when she is finally able to acknowledge the masculine superiority of the hero and accept the code of the West (1998: 180-182).

## 6. The Post-Western

Just one year after the publication of *The Virginian*, the first silent Western film entitled *The Great Train Robbery* was released (Schatz 1992: 431). The emergence of the cinematic counterpart of the genre helped increase its popularity and ensured its accessibility to a wider audience. Many of the Western films produced in Hollywood were based on the novels of Zane Grey, Max Brand, Jack Schaefer and Louis L'Amour, who carried the genre forward into its most productive period. Reaching its heyday in the late 1950s (Schatz 1992: 430), Westerns accounted for over 10 per cent of the works of fiction published in the United States and constituted eight of the top ten television shows in the rankings (Cawelti 1999: 1). However, from the late 1960s the genre began to fall into decline (Cawelti 1999: 2-3).

The gradual drop in the popularity of the Western demonstrated a fundamental need for a reassessment of the myth of the West upon which much of its mass appeal was based. For many Americans the romanticized vision of American history, cultivated by the Western, was irreconcilable with the harrowing Vietnam War experience (Cawelti 1999: 100; McVeigh 2004: 149). The myth of the West was further undermined by the Civil Rights Movement as well as the Native American rights movement of the 1960s (Cawelti 1999: 160), which contested the long-standing notion that the United States was founded on principles of egalitarianism, democracy and freedom. By telling the history of westward expansion from a non-white perspective, African American, Indian and Mexican-American writers drew attention to the violent treatment of ethnic minorities by colonizers, which was largely ignored in classic Western fiction (Stevens 1997: par. 9; Slotkin 1998: 589). Finally, the 1960s witnessed the second wave of the feminist movement, which extended women's rights and increased their role in public life (Baxandall and Gordon 2002: 426-428). Once the most popular form of fiction in the United States

(Schatz 1992: 430), the Western, with its apotheosis of a white, male hero, stereotypical depiction of indigenous people, superficial treatment of female characters and a one-sided portrayal of American history, simply became irrelevant. In order to be saved from oblivion, the genre had to undergo a critical review and the significance of its dominant constituents had to be carefully reexamined.

The resulting transformations in the genre are noticeable in both its literary and cinematic form. In literature, the Western novels of contemporary writers, including Larry McMurtry and Cormac McCarthy question the myth of the West as a land of limitless opportunities and underscore the violent character of the conquest. In addition, female characters in the Western novels of writers such as Sandra Dallas are no longer subordinate to men nor devoid of emotional complexity. As regards cinematography, Sidney Poitier's *Buck and the Preacher* (1972) differs from classic representatives of the genre by elevating a member of the oppressed ethnic minorities to the position of the film's protagonist, while Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) may serve as an example of a revisionist Western by challenging the concept of an idealized cowboy-hero. These are just a small number of examples illustrating the modifications that the genre has undergone to adapt to the changing political, cultural and social circumstances of the post-war United States. In fact, some literary critics attribute the longevity of the genre to its adaptability, its remarkable "capacity to respond to a changing social, economic and cultural landscape", which frequently involves "travelling across generic boundaries, poaching and borrowing from many different traditions, whilst contributing to the innovation of the genre" (Campbell 2011: 409-411; Johnson 2012: 124-125). In the twenty-first century the flexibility of the Western is especially prominent in the medium of television, with many TV series, including *Deadwood*, *Heels on Wheels* as well as the highly successful *The Walking Dead* drawing on the conventions of the genre (Johnson 2012: 123-124). Finally, it could also be argued that

the evolution of the Western in the last few decades manifests its strong dependence on the mythology of the West, which continues to occupy an influential position in American consciousness, albeit, now, in a more inclusive and varied form (Lusted 2014: 233).

## 7. Conclusion

Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" provides an invaluable insight into the mythology that has developed around the American West since the arrival of the first Puritan settlers. This mythology is to a considerable extent perpetuated in classic Western fiction. On the basis of Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, staple characteristics of the genre may be distinguished, many of which correspond to the premises of the Frontier Thesis. Perhaps the most striking resemblance between the essay and the novel lies in the portrayal of the West as a place of moral regeneration as well as a land of freedom, equality and democracy. In addition, Wister's Virginian bears all the quintessential American traits of character mentioned by Turner. Finally, both Turner and Wister ignore the plight of Indians and refrain from discussing women's rights.

The decrease in the popularity of the Western, which commenced in the late 1960s, manifested the exhaustion of the genre, which was no longer compatible with pessimistic post-war thinking. In addition, the civil rights and feminist movements of the time put forward a less idealized vision, initiating a debate on the violent past of America and discrimination against non-white minorities. The ideological transformations that the Western underwent in the second half of the 20th century reflect a more critical stance towards the myth of the West. In spite of this, the evolution of the formula testifies to the long-lasting power of the myth, which continues to exert an influence on American society, even though the Frontier is long gone.

## References

- Baxandall, Rosalyn, Linda Gordon (2002). "Second-wave feminism". In: Nancy A. Hewitt (ed.). *A Companion to American Women's History*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 414-430.
- Bremer, Francis J. (1995). *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards*. Hanover – London: University Press of New England.
- Campbell, Neil (2011). "Post-Western cinema". In: Nicolas S. Witschi (ed.). *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American West*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 409-423.
- Cawelti, John G. (1977). "The Western: A look at the evolution of a formula". In: *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 192-259.
- Cawelti, John G. (1999). *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.
- Etulain, Richard W. (1996). "The West as frontier". In: *Re-Imagining the American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 3-78.
- Gray, Richard (2004). *A History of American Literature*. Malden, Oxford, and Carlton: Blackwell Publishing.
- Johnson, Michael K. (2012). "Introduction: Television and the depiction of the American West". *Western American Literature* 47/2: 123-131. Literary Reference Center. Accessed 19 October 2017.
- Kowalczyk-Twarowski, Krzysztof, Teresa Pyzik (2004). "Przedmowa". In: Krzysztof Kowalczyk-Twarowski, Teresa Pyzik (eds.). *Wielkie tematy literatury amerykańskiej. Tom 2: „Granica”, pogranicze, zachód*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 9-14.
- Lusted, David (2014). *The Western*. Abingdon. New York: Routledge.
- McVeigh, Stephen (2007). *The American Western*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Schatz, Thomas (1992). "The Western". In: Jack Nachbar, Kevin Lause (eds.). *Popular Culture: An Introductory Text*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 430-444.
- Slotkin, Richard (1998). *The Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

- Stevens, David (1997). "Literature of the American West and frontier". *Ideas and Issues in Literature*, n. pag. Literary Reference Center Plus. Accessed 10 April 2017.
- Tompkins, Jane (1992). "Women and the language of men". In: *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*. New York: Oxford University Press, 47-68.
- Topping, Gary, Tom Frazier, David Peck (2010). "The Western novel". *Critical Survey of Long Fiction*. Fourth Edition. Literary Reference Center Plus. Accessed 10 April 2017.
- Turner, Frederick Jackson (1921 [1893]). "The significance of the frontier in American history". In: *The Frontier in American History*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1-38. Available at <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22994/22994-h/22994-h.htm>>. Accessed 10 April 2017.
- Winthrop, John (1630). "A model of Christian charity". In: Richard S. Dunn, Laetitia Yeandle (eds.). *The Journal of John Winthrop 1630-1649*. Cambridge, Massachusetts – London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1-12.
- Wister, Owen (1902). *The Virginian*. Available at <<https://dailylit.com/read/73-the-virginian-horseman-of-the-plains>>. Accessed 10 April 2017.
- Zachara, Małgorzata (2009). "Geopolityka granic. Amerykańskie dylematy bezpieczeństwa w XXI wieku". In: Włodzimierz Bernacki, Adam Walaszek (eds.). *Amerykomania: Księga jubileuszowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Andrzejowi Mani*. Tom 1. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 247-273.

Anna Dulska  
Centrum Języków Obcych  
Uniwersytet Gdańskiego  
Armii Krajowej 119/121  
81-824 Sopot  
Poland  
[sjoadu@ug.edu.pl](mailto:sjoadu@ug.edu.pl)



**“From jubilation to despair”:  
Representations of drink  
in British and Irish literature**

WOJCIECH KLEPUSZEWSKI

*Received 5.12.2016,  
received in revised form 23.11.2017,  
accepted 30.11.2017.*

**Abstract**

The theme of drink in literature has been the focus of scholarly interest for a few decades, though much of it tends to concentrate on the writers' lives more than literature per se, particularly in the studies concerning American literature. Criticism concerning British and Irish literature mostly discusses selected periods, the works of individual writers, or concentrates on regional literature, in this last case usually in the form of annotated anthologies. This article proposes a perspective whose focal point is the paradigm shift in the literary representation of drink, from the conviviality prevalent in pre-twentieth-century literature to the harrowing depictions of alcoholism in contemporary works.

**Keywords**

Britain, drink, fiction, Ireland, poetry

**„Od świętowania do rozpacz”:  
przedstawienia alkoholu w literaturze  
brytyjskiej i irlandzkiej**

**Abstrakt**

Motyw alkoholu w literaturze od kilku już dekad znajduje się w kręgu zainteresowania badaczy, choć w dużej mierze koncentrują się oni na pisarzach, a nie literaturze jako takiej, szczególnie w opracowaniach dotyczących literatury amerykańskiej. W publikacjach dotyczących literatury brytyjskiej i irlandzkiej na ogół znajdziemy opracowania dotyczące wybranych okresów literackich, twórczości poszczególnych pisarzy, a nawet literatury regionalnej, często w formie antologii zawierających komentarz krytyczny. Prezentowany artykuł proponuje spojrzenie na zmieniający się paradymat obrazowania alkoholu w literaturze, od poprzedzających literaturę dwudziestowieczną motywów radosnego upojenia do wstrząsających obrazów alkoholizmu w literaturze współczesnej.

**Słowa kluczowe**

alkohol, Irlandia, poezja, powieść, Wielka Brytania

Drink as a literary theme is probably as old as literature itself, which provides plentiful examples of how the products of fermentation and distillation become a source of jubilation to some, while a curse to others. Literary representations of drink are legion in all genres and in different literary periods, and reflect attitudes prevalent in various cultural contexts. The critical interest in what might be labelled as drink literature has been growing for a few decades, partly focusing on literature only, and partly discussing literary works within the interdisciplinary field of drinking studies, comprising areas such as culture, history, or sociology.

Criticism examining the drink-literature intersection is obviously not homogenous, but two different approaches are distinctly apparent. The first one is author- rather than literature-oriented, and, as it is more biographical, it concentrates

on the writers' drinking problems, less so on literature *per se*. This is characteristic of studies concerning the American literary scene with its numerous alcoholic writers,<sup>1</sup> such as Charles Bukowski or Francis Scott Fitzgerald. The second approach, employed in this article, focalises drink as a theme in literature, largely or completely ignoring the correlation between the writers' alcoholism and their literary output. This tendency is dominant in the critical discussion of literature in Britain and Ireland,<sup>2</sup> a case in point being *Shakespeare and Alcohol* by Buckner Trawick (1978), in which its author emphasises "the significance of Shakespeare's references to alcoholic beverages" (1978: 7), or David Daiches's annotated anthology, *A Wee Dram: Drinking Scenes from Scottish Literature* (1990), comprising a variety of texts featuring whisky, the Scottish *uisge-beatha* ('water of life').

With its long history, literature of the British Isles is abundant in drink-related themes, which can be examined from numerous perspectives. One such possibility is a more regional angle, as in Daiches' anthology mentioned above, or, to provide another example, in a collection devoted exclusively to Irish literature, *Bottle, Draught and Keg: An Irish Drinking Anthology* (1995), edited by Laurence Flanagan. A more specific and critical, rather than anthological, is Trawick's study on the Shakespearean plays. Optionally, such a narrow perspective can extend beyond the literary matters. This is what Edward Hewett and William Axton do in *Convivial Dickens: The Drinks of Dickens and His Times* (1983), not entirely focused on literature, but also discussing the drinks and drinking customs of the Victorian era. Obviously, the potential problem areas to explore are plentiful, but the available criticism offers only

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, *The Thirsty Muse: Alcohol and the American Writer* by Tom Dardis (1989).

<sup>2</sup> Although one can easily enumerate the names of British and Irish writers with a serious alcoholic problem, such as Patrick Hamilton, Malcolm Lowry, Brendan Behan, or Dylan Thomas, there have been no critical studies focusing on their work through the prism of their drink problems.

a handful of studies, most of them being general surveys.<sup>3</sup> The perspective this article focuses on is the paradigm shift in the literary representation of drink, reflecting the changing perception of drink consumption, from the conviviality generally permeating pre-twentieth-century literature to those voices which, particularly in contemporary fiction, “register stupefaction, incomprehension, [and] inarticulacy” (Kennedy 2015: 121).

As far as the literature of the British Isles is concerned, the image of drink as a key element of celebration can be found as early as Old English poetry, in which the thanes celebrate victory and hail the fame of the lord while drinking mead. However, as Hugh Magennis argues in his *Anglo-Saxon Appetites* (1998), the connotation of drink in Old English poetry is much more figurative, the importance being attached to “the *idea* of drinking, not to its physical reality” (1998: 12). Thus the festive element has a symbolic meaning, as opposed to the corporeal one in medieval literary renditions, particularly the excellent portraits of the joyous drunkards in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, whose pilgrims recount stories including scenes of drunken debauchery. In fact, drink not only appears in the pilgrims’ narratives, but also heavily affects their performance. The Miller, for instance, warns the audience that his advanced state of inebriation might impair his oratorical skills: “And therfore, if that I mysspeke or seye, / Wyte it the ale of Southwerk, I you preye” (1974: 78). Conviviality is also characteristic of the drink imagery in the works of William Shakespeare, which offer a well-stocked repository of characters celebrating drink. Shakespeare’s plays are thronged with merry imbibers: Christopher Sly in the *Taming of the Shrew* falls victim to a joke only because he is heavily under the influence; much in the vein of *Richard the Third*’s desperate need for a horse, another of Shakespeare’s characters, Boy in *Henry the Fifth*, declares: “I would give all my fame for a pot of ale” (Act

<sup>3</sup> Trawick’s book, for instance, is partly a guide, defining the variety of drinks appearing in the plays of the famous Stratfordian, such as the spiced mead called *Metheglin* (cf. 1978: 30).

III, Scene II); and Caliban in *The Tempest* yields to the power of the “celestial liquor” offered by Trinculo and Stephano (Act II, Scene II).

However, nowhere are the joys of drinking more expounded than in poetry and songs,<sup>4</sup> poetry being, after all, a convenient literary form to employ the drink theme, not only because it is usually concise, but, more importantly, because in its nature it is often celebratory. A rich collection of these is, for instance, Theodore Maynard’s 1919 anthology *A Tankard of Ale*, which includes examples from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, some anonymous, but most authored by distinguished poets. The collection includes some of the Romantic poets who praise drink in their verse, such as John Keats’s in “Lines on the Mermaid Tavern”, in which Canary wine is hailed as “beverage divine” (1919: 70), and Lord Byron, who, in “Fill the Goblet Again” advocates drinking wine: “Let us drink – who would not?” (1919: 67). Byron, in fact, is one of those poets who offer numerous jovial examples, probably following the conviction expounded in *Don Juan*: “Man, being reasonable, must get drunk; / The best of life is but intoxication” (Byron 1858: 103).

Discussing literature of the years 1780–1830, Anya Taylor observes that the period is prolific in “songs of celebration, narrative poems, [but also] elegies for those who drank too much, [and] confessions of inebriation” (1999: 5). What this implies is that with the nineteenth century approaching, there are more and more literary representations of drink which slowly depart from pure conviviality and become a springboard for serious ruminations on intemperance. George Crabbe, for instance, in his satirical poem “Inebriety” (1775) writes about the pitfalls of drink abuse, and expounds on the types of drinkers<sup>5</sup> as well as the various effects excessive consumption of drink has on them:

<sup>4</sup> Numerous examples are quoted and discussed in Klepuszewski (2017).

<sup>5</sup> A similar kind of typology had been undertaken much earlier in Thomas Nashe’s satire, *Pierce Penilesse* (1592), in which he makes a list of different states of being drunk, such as “ape drunke” or “lion drunke”, reflecting various behavioural patterns – lively, aggressive or even lecherous (cf. Bold 1982: 145–146).

This drinks and fights, another drinks and loves.  
A bastard zeal, of different kinds it shows,  
And now with rage, and now religion glows:  
The frantic soul bright reason's path defies,  
Now creeps on earth, now triumphs in the skies;  
Swims in the seas of error, and explores,  
Through midnight mists, the fluctuating shores;  
From wave to wave in rocky channel glides;  
In pride exalted, or by shame deprest,  
An angel-devil, or a human-beast.  
Some rage in all the strength of folly mad;  
Some love stupidity, in silence clad,  
Are never quarrelsome, are never gay,  
But sleep, and groan, and drink the night away;  
(Crabbe 1840: 303)

At the beginning of the next century, texts in the type of Charles Lamb's "Confessions of a Drunkard" (1813) herald a new approach to drinking, viewing it through the prism of moral principles. Such texts can be considered forerunners of the nineteenth century Temperance movement, whose main campaigner, Joseph Livesey, published the monthly *Preston Temperance Advocate* (1834-1837) to promote the ideas of the movement. One has to emphasise here that the period is quite a turning point in the social perception of drinking alcohol and that at the time, as Iain Gately observes, "[t]he concept that humanity might live without any kind of alcoholic drink was revolutionary in Western thought" (2009: 248). The oblique didacticism advocating moderation or even total abstinence is not only present in Livesey's monthly or some non-fictional works, such as *Improvement of the Working People: Drunkenness – Education* (1834) by the social reformer Francis Place, but also, to a very limited extent, in literature, whose quality is often eclipsed by temperance ideology. The most radical representative here was probably William McGonagall (1825-1902), devoted in his temperance mission, though unsuccessful literature-wise, whom McSmith ranks as "the worst poet in the history of the English language [who was] paid five shillings for

a public recital so that his mostly working-class audiences could jeer at his bad poetry or pelt him with rotten vegetables" (2008). As McSmith explains, McGonagall conveniently justified the lack of appreciation of his poetry by claiming that "alcohol was to blame for his audiences' failure to appreciate his work" (2008). A sample of McGonagall's crusade against drinking is his poem "The Demon Drink":

Oh, thou demon Drink, thou fell destroyer;  
Thou curse of society, and its great annoyer.  
What has thou done to society, let me think?  
I answer thou hast caused the most of ills, thou demon Drink.  
(Laing 2014: 58)

However, all this is not to say that Victorian literature is short of texts in which drink is represented in a convivial and celebratory manner. With the appearance of the novel in the eighteenth century, literaraisations of drink in poetry become less conspicuous because fiction gradually outnumbers other literary forms in volume and engages the theme in all kinds of settings. This is partly because of the numerous subgenres which allow fiction to exploit a far broader spectrum of contexts. A rich area of drink-focused study of literature is the nineteenth-century novel, a prime example being Charles Dickens, in whose novels various imbibers "reel through the pages" (Booth 1997: 213). On the whole, much of Dickens's fiction is full of what Pratt calls "scenes of intoxicated conviviality" (2015: 801), as there is a general ambience of relishing drink. Dickens's great-grandson, Cedric, in his 1980 *Drinking with Dickens*, points out that "there was much in his books concerning good cheer and plentiful libations" (1998: 12), taking place in a variety of drinking venues. This aspect of Dickensian fiction is discussed in detail in Steve Earnshaw's study *The Pub in Literature*, which, in the chapter titled "Dickens" lists almost fifty places, a "catalogue of hostelries" (2000: 189), such as taverns, alehouses or, in a more archaic version, tippling houses. However, with all the abundance of joyous drink-

ing scenes in such places, drink in Dickensian fiction can also be framed within the context of harsh Victorian reality, its function here far-removed from the merry revelries mentioned by Cedric Dickens. In *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*, for instance, Bill Sikes and his cronies force Oliver to drink wine in a symbolic act depriving him of his childhood naivety: “Down with it, innocence” (1866: 169). A much more agonising picture can be found in *Hard Times*, in which Stephen Blackpool’s alcoholic wife epitomises his dire predicament:

A disabled, drunken creature, barely able to preserve her sitting posture by steadyng herself with one begrimed hand on the floor, while the other was so purposeless in trying to push away her tangled hair from her face, that it only blinded her the more with the dirt upon it. A creature so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains, and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy, that it was a shameful thing even to see her. (Dickens 2008: 73)

Finally, let us mention the bleak depiction of alcoholic inferno in Dickens’s short story “The Drunkard’s Death”, where alcoholism not only affects the protagonist, described here as a “confirmed and irreclaimable drunkard” (1854: 298), but his whole family.

The fatalistic mood of Dickens’s story is reminiscent of the way drink functions in Thomas Hardy’s novels, in which he portrays “characters whose failures are often precipitated or accelerated by their thirst” (Pratt 2015: 801). A good example of drink being inseparable from various characters’ catastrophic fates is the opening passage of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The drunk hay-trusser, Michael Henchard, selling his wife for five guineas, explains the rationale behind this act as follows: “For my part I don’t see why men who have got wives and don’t want ‘em shouldn’t get rid of ‘em as these gipsy fellows do their old horses” (2004: 10). One should probably add here that drink in Hardy’s fiction, as can be seen in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), can also symbolise the escape from misery: “What could he do of a lower kind than self-extermination;

what was there less noble, more in keeping with his degraded position? He could get drunk. Of course that was it; he had forgotten. Drinking was the regular, stereotyped resource of the despairing worthless" (1995: 58).

The range of literary representations of drink in nineteenth-century fiction is obviously much more extensive than the few examples pointed out above, but it is twentieth-century fiction that brings a whole spectrum of works in which drink functions as an important determinant, both in terms of the narrative and the shaping of characters, usually in contexts far-removed from conviviality. In general, one could say that twentieth-century drink literature is no longer synonymous with a joyous celebration, and the backgrounds are often sinister and disturbing. The new perspectives on the cultural and social significance of alcohol consumption (or abuse), manifested, for instance, in the emergence of Alcoholics Anonymous, the American aid fellowship set up in 1935, and the growing medical interest in the issue, undoubtedly influences much of the writings. This applies particularly to fiction, but can also be traced in other literary forms, though the range here is not particularly wide. As opposed to the immense popularity of poeticising drink in poems and songs mentioned earlier, there is little treatment of the theme available in contemporary poetry, and those rare voices are generally dissimilar in mood to the aura of conviviality and celebration. A good example is Tony Harrison's long poem *V.*, in which drink imagery symbolises aggravation of the skinhead who, "pissed on [cheap] beer" (2000: 9), desecrates graves with crude, four-letter word graffiti. Very much the same applies to contemporary drama. In his study on twentieth-century playwrights, DiGaetani discusses heavy drinking characters, such as Hirst, an upper-class alcoholic in Harold Pinter's *No Man's Land*. Apart from the focus on Pinter, DiGaetani devotes a much-telling chapter ("Alcoholism"; 2008: 78-93) to the function of drink in the works of various contemporary playwrights, including Simon Gray, Brian Friel and Martin McDonagh. Here again, as the very title of the chapter implies, drink is embedded in pathological contexts.

However, it is contemporary fiction which offers plentiful examples in the realm of drink literature, particularly focusing on the destructive force of alcohol in human life. A number of the writers who contributed great fictional works in this respect were themselves heavily dependent on alcohol. Patrick Hamilton, Malcolm Lowry or Jean Rhys, all belong to a special category of writers who transpose alcohol into literature, imbuing their writings with their own alcoholic experience, and for this reason should probably be treated separately.<sup>6</sup>

However, there is a great body of fiction which is not, at least not directly or evidently, inspired by the writers' own alcoholic struggles. Contemporary fiction in Britain and Ireland offers many compelling depictions of alcoholism, though not quite near the dissection of the type offered in the iconic American novel *The Lost Weekend* (1944) by Charles Jackson. Many of British and Irish novels are pervaded with alcohol, though they do not focus exclusively on alcoholism as a clinical case, but rather present the characters' lives warped by excessive drinking, as in Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983), drink being, to quote Jordison, the background for "human entanglements" (2012). In many fictional works the characters seem to be lost in a semi-alcoholic haze, or "half-drunk consciousness" as Joe Kennedy (2015: 127) defines it in his discussion of Henry Green's *Back* (1946) and William Sansom's *The Body* (1949), a fragment of the latter novel being most illustrative here:

The drink was souring inside me. My head began, slightly at first, muzzily to ache. I saw a public lavatory, tiled and sunless – I went in and down. Underneath, among the tiles, in the aqueous gloom of the pavement lights, it was cooler. Other men were there, but they stood independently – the sense of the crowd was gone. There was a bubbling of irrigation water – and suddenly, very suddenly, *almost as a revelation* to my aching head, I realized the presence

<sup>6</sup> The same applies, of course, to strictly autobiographical treatments of alcohol, that is *alcoholic memoirs* (often called *recovery memoirs*, if, of course, they chronicle the author's successful return to sobriety) such as John Gardner's *Spin the Bottle: The Autobiography of an Alcoholic* (1964).

of the pipes. Pipes I saw. They ran everywhere – white-painted pipes, gleaming copper pipes, old dust-laden pipes, and all of them curling and branching and forking like things alive and waiting; some suddenly bulged, like snakes digesting a swallowed prey. The full horror of plumbing came to me. Disintoxication in a strange way sharpened my eyes – though much was muddled, certain objects obtruded themselves with startling clarity. (1959: 183-184)

Drink-themed fiction is particularly deeply-ingrained in the prose of Scottish and Irish writers, in part a reflection of the drinking cultures. Such backgrounds are bound to provide various literary representations, and these are, in fact, plentiful. In Scotland, a specific drink landscape is offered by what Smith calls the “hard-drinking Scottish male writing” (Smith 2004), particularly Gordon Williams’s *The Siege of Trencher’s Farm* (1969). In the novel, the local pub-dweller, Tom Hedden, spends his time at The Inn, as it is called, and later becomes the ring-leader of the eponymous siege to catch the murderer of his daughter, the siege being laid by a number of whisky-fuelled locals. Another novel referred to by Smith is Alasdair Gray’s 1982, *Janine* (1984), featuring Jock McLeish, an alcoholic installer of alarm systems, who, in the opening passages, establishes the proper terminology to be used when defining his relation to drink: “I’m certainly alcoholic, but not a drunkard” (2003: 2). Heavy drinking is also the attribute of Danny Skinner, the protagonist of Irvine Welsh’s *The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs* (2006). Danny’s predominant activity is drinking pints of Lowenbrau and “knocking down the double JD and Pepsi” (2007: 217), his addiction resembling an emotional relationship, the sense of security provided by the bottle: “As he savoured his intoxication and thought of the bottle of Johnnie Walker that sat in his flat, Skinner’s grin expanded to the width of the street. He was back on home territory” (351).

In many Scottish novels, drink, mostly whisky, functions in rather depressing backgrounds, often set in urban landscapes and working-class communities. Glasgow, for instance, is prominently highlighted in numerous novels, such as *Dancing*

*in the Streets* (1958), Clifford Hanley's account of his early years in the city where drinking, as he puts it, was "savage" (1983: 25). In a much more recent novel, *Our Fathers* (2006), Andrew O'Hagan's main characters are family related: grandfather, father and son, all "hard-drinking Catholic Glaswegians" (Glancey 1999). The last in line, Jamie Bawn, refers to his father's alcoholism by comparing him to a "blind-drunk bat in love with the dark" (O'Hagan 2006: 6), but they all are, in fact, "damaged men" (Glancey 1999),<sup>7</sup> Jamie's father additionally also damaging, if only because of his violent treatment of his wife. Another novel set in Glasgow is James Kelman's *A Disaffection* (1989), a story of a frustrated and embittered alcoholic schoolteacher, Patrick Doyle. Kelman's drink-writing is also prominent in his short stories, collected in, for instance, *Greyhound for Breakfast* (1988), which features working-class Glaswegians, drink seemingly an inherent part of their everyday lives.

Contemporary Irish literature offers a lot of varied examples of similarly distressing depictions of drink in fictional works, one such to be found in "Just Visiting", a story by the writer of Irish origin settled in Scotland, Bernard MacLaverty, in which Paddy Quinn, a cancer-diagnosed alcoholic slowly ending up his life in hospital, is visited by Ben, his friend. Ben is not just a visitor, but also functions as a mastermind of what might be called drink manoeuvres, intended to supply Paddy with whiskey, his last remaining lifeline. Ben delivers a flat half-bottle of Scotch for Paddy, pondering on the ingenuity of the very concept of such: "They're made flat like that for the pocket. No bulge, no evidence. A design to fit the Scots and the Irish psyche" (Haining 2002: 321). There is an inescapable feeling of Ben's clandestine "bottle logistics" being awkward, if not shameful. Drink is no longer a badge of pride, as in, for instance, Robert Burns' poem "Scotch Drink" (2008: 98-101),

<sup>7</sup> In general the alcoholic protagonists tend to be male, but there are exceptions here, such as Hannah Luckraft in A.L. Kennedy's *Paradise* (2005), who defines her own personality using the alcoholic collocations: "I am distilled. Washed down to nothing" (2005: 19).

and in fact this degrading element attached to the fictional representations of drink in contemporary literature is quite prevailing. Another good example here is Brian Moore's *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955), a story of a piano teacher who comforts her spinster life with whiskey she consumes in the seclusion of her room: "What is to become of me, O Lord, alone in this city, with only drink, hateful drink that dulls me, disgraces me, lonely drink that leaves me more lonely, more despised?" (1988: 225). Similarly, in the recent thriller *The Girl on the Train* (2015), by the Zimbabwe-born English writer, Paula Hawkins, drinking is furtive, the protagonist, Rachel, consuming her "pre-mixed gin and tonic" (2016: 17) and other such concoctions in substitute plastic bottles whose labels conceal the real contents.

What is quite characteristic of contemporary British and Irish fiction in which drink is an important part of the narrative, the focal point is usually the emotional ravages caused by alcohol. Even in MacLaverty's story, where Paddy's condition is the result of his long-time alcohol abuse and the devastation it has caused, the physical dimension is dominated by more philosophical reflections concerning drinking, a good example being Paddy's attempt to define alcoholism: "Addiction is a strange bastard. It creates a need where no need existed. And satisfying it creates a pleasure where no pleasure existed" (320). A slight deviation here are Roddy Doyle's novels, *The Woman who Walked into Doors* (1996) and its sequel *Paula Spencer* (2006), in both of which emotional disturbance exists side by side with pathographic depictions of alcoholic stupor. In the two novels alcohol fuses with anger and drink-fuelled violence, rendering the nastier face of drink abuse. The first novel is a story of an alcoholic woman, Paula Spencer, who has been maltreated by her husband for years, a harrowing account of her drab existence, domestic violence and a world in which drink offers an easy though illusory escape. It is also an accusatory voice against the superficial judgements and the "mechanisms" of evasive indifference:

The doctor never looked at me. He studied parts of me but never looked at my eyes. He never looked at me when he spoke. He never saw me. Drink, he said to himself. I could see his nose twitching, taking in the smell, deciding. None of the doctors looked at me. (1996: 186)

Part of the novel focuses on the viciousness and brutality of Paula's husband, Charlo, but much as these graphic depictions are disturbing, much more unnerving are the passages in which Paula's motherhood falls in direct conflict with her addiction:

I kissed John Paul. I got into the bed beside him. He woke me up in the morning. He was trying to get over me. God love him, he was terrified. His mother in her Sunday clothes and shoes beside him in the bed. And sick on the pillow. I turned the pillow over and closed my eyes. (84)

Whereas in *The Woman who Walked into Doors* Paula is a victim of abuse and an “[a]lco. Alco. Paula the alco” (115), as she defines herself, in *Paula Spencer* she struggles to keep sober, yet fully aware of her environment, working-class and largely unemployed: “[e]veryone’s an alco these days” (2006: 137). However, the most bitter and painful part of the novel is coming to terms with the fact that her daughter, Leanne, has become dependent on drink, a fact which is a new challenge, particularly difficult for someone who has had the very same experience: “What does an alcoholic mother say to her alcoholic daughter?” (2006: 20-21).

\*\*\*

The juxtaposition of two different perspectives in the literarisation of drink reflects the changing cultural paradigm, and reveals a visible shift “from jubilation to despair”.<sup>8</sup> Pre-twentieth-

---

<sup>8</sup> The line is borrowed from Anya Taylor’s 1999 study, *Bacchus in Romantic England: Writers and Drink 1780-1830* (30).

century British and Irish literature abounds in literary depictions of drink being symbolic of conviviality, evoking the spirit of festivity and celebration, or having a remedial power which allows to "banish despair in a mug" (Maynard 1919: 37). The twentieth century is a convenient counterpoint here, though as this article suggests, the first visible transition in the way the drink theme is rendered takes place in nineteenth-century literature. This obviously mirrors the changing attitude to alcohol at different historical points. There are numerous examples to consider: the brewing of beer for its nutritional purpose in the Middle Ages; the Irish and Scottish "aquavita", as it is referred to in the 1494 Scottish Exchequer Rolls (cf. Brown 1993: 10), boosting the spirit and believed to have medicinal properties; the eighteenth century Gin Craze, a period when, owing to its low price, gin was within easy reach of the poor, "Drunk for one penny. Dead drunk for two" (Dillon 2004: 37); the growing problem of drunkenness in industrialised England (cf. Nicholls 2013: 201), highly detrimental to the workers' efficiency, and finally, mass access to alcoholic beverages from the twentieth-century onwards, with the whole industry to diagnose, analyse, and treat alcoholism.

All this finds its literary representation. The very same "despair" which drink can alleviate, as the anonymous poem quoted earlier promises, in contemporary British and Irish literature, predominantly fiction, is usually pictured as the result of drink consumption. Alcohol usually appears in disturbing contexts, often familial, where it is destructive in social and emotional terms. As opposed to the communal merrymaking during social gatherings in alehouses and inns, the contemporary depictions often feature solitary drinkers, whose lives are obsessively limited to the technicalities of drink, as it were, a good example being Hannah Luckraft: "Bushmills, County Antrim, 700 millilitres, 40 percent. I mean, what else do you need to know?" (Kennedy 2005: 17). As this article has tried to argue, one critical avenue in considering drink-themed literature written in the British Isles is the general paradigm shift in the literary representations of alcohol. The value of such a per-

spective is that it clearly reflects the correlation between the cultural perceptions and their literary reflections. Obviously, this is just one possible approach, but the abundance of material in the field of drink literature certainly calls for further analysis and detailed thematic studies.

## References

- Booth, John (1997). *Creative Spirits: A Toast to Literary Drinkers*. London: André Deutsch.
- Brown, Gordon (1993). *The Whisky Trails: A Geographical Guide to Scotch Whisky*. London: Prion.
- Burns, Robert (2008). *The Collected Poems of Robert Burns*. Ware: Wordsworth.
- Byron, George Gordon (1858). *Don Juan*. Boston: Philips, Sampson.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey (1977). *The Canterbury Tales*. Robert Pratt (ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Crabbe, George (1840). *The Poetical Works of the Rev. George Crabbe; With His letters and Journals, and His Life*. Vol II. London: John Murray.
- Dickens, Cedric (1998). *Drinking with Dickens*. New York: New Amsterdam Books.
- Dickens, Charles (2008). *Hard Times*. New York: Signet.
- Dickens, Charles (1854). *Sketches by Boz: Illustrative of every-day life and every-day people*. Available at <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/882/882-h/882-h.htm>>. Accessed 15 May 2016.
- Dickens, Charles (1866). *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*. London: Chapman and Hall.
- DiGaetani, John Louis (2008). *Stages of Struggle: Modern Playwrights and Their Psychological Inspirations*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland.
- Dillon, Patrick (2004). *Gin: The Much-lamented Death of Madame Geneva*. Boston: Justin, Charles & Co.
- Doyle, Roddy (2007). *Paula Spencer*. London: Vintage.
- Doyle, Roddy (1998). *The Woman who Walked into Doors*. London: Vintage.
- Earnshaw, Steve (2000). *The Pub in Literature: England's Altered State*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Gately, Iain (2009). *Drink: A Cultural History of Alcohol*. New York: Gotham Books.

- Glancey, Jonathan (1999). "Utopia & Sons". *The Guardian*, 20 March.
- Gray, Alasdair (2003). *1982, Janine*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books.
- Haining, Peter (ed.) (2002). *Great Irish Drinking Stories: The Craic's the Thing*. London: Souvenir Press.
- Hanley, Clifford (1983). *Dancing in the Street*. Edinburgh: Mainstream.
- Hardy, Thomas (1995). *Jude the Obscure*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions.
- Hardy, Thomas (2004). *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harrison, Tony (2000). V. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books.
- Hawkins, Paula (2016). *The Girl on the Train*. London: Black Swan.
- Jordison, Sam (2012). "Booker club: *Last Orders* by Graham Swift". *The Guardian*, 24 July.
- Kennedy, A.L. (2005). *Paradise*. London: Vintage.
- Kennedy, Joe (2015). "Tipsiness and 'the reigning stupefaction' in the British fiction of the late 1940s". In: Eugene Brennan, Russel Williams (eds.). *Literature and Intoxication: Writing, Politics and the Experience of Excess*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 119-129.
- Klepuszewski, Wojciech (2017). "The joyous inebriation: Drinking and conviviality in poetry and song". In: Victor Kennedy, Michelle Gadpaille (eds.). *Ethnic and Cultural Identity in Music and Song Lyric*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 64-76.
- Laing, Robin (2014). *The Whisky Muse: Scotch Whisky in Poem and Song*. Edinburgh: Luath, London: Chapman and Hall.
- Magennis, Hugh (1998). *Anglo-Saxon Appetites: Food and Drink and Their Consumption in Old English and Related Literature*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.
- Maynard, Theodore (ed.) (1919). *A Tankard of Ale: An Anthology of Drinking Songs*. London: Erskine Macdonald.
- McSmith, Andy (2008). "The story of William McGonagall, the worst poet in the history of the English language". *The Independent*, 17 May.
- Moore, Brian (1988). *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.
- Nicholls, John (2013). *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- O'Hagan, Andrew (2006). *Our Fathers*. London: Faber and Faber.

- Pratt, David C. (2015). "Role of alcohol in literature". In: Scott Christopher Martin (ed.). *The Sage Encyclopedia of Alcohol: Social, Cultural, and Historical Perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: SAGE Publications, 798-804.
- Sansom, William (1959). *The Body*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Smith, Ali (2004). "The road to oblivion". *The Guardian*, 28 August.
- Trawick, Buckner B. (1978). *Shakespeare and Alcohol*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Welsh, Irvine (2007). *The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs*. London: Vintage Books.

Wojciech Klepuszewski  
Wydział Humanistyczny  
Politechnika Koszalińska  
Kwiatkowskiego 6e  
75-343 Koszalin  
Poland  
klepuszewski@poczta.pl

**Voiceing the Maori issue:  
Patricia Grace's *Small Holes in the Silence:*  
*Short Stories***

EWA KROPLEWSKA

*Received 16.04.2016,  
received in revised form 22.10.2017,  
accepted 9.11.2017.*

**Abstract**

Patricia Grace is one of the authors whose career began during the Maori Renaissance, attempting to voice the problems of Maori people. Similarly to her previous works, the short stories included in the collection *Small Holes in the Silence: Short Stories* provide an overview of the human condition in the contemporary world, with special attention paid to Maori society. Grace provides the readers with a glimpse of the lives of ordinary Maori people in precarious situations. Her stories are pervaded with silence. The use of omission and understatement is combined with the introduction of passive characters whose worlds are filled with the secret, the unknown or the void.

**Key words**

communication, Patricia Grace, Maori, short story, silence

## **Głos w kwestii maoryskiej: *Small Holes in the Silence* Patricii Grace**

### **Abstrakt**

Patricia Grace należy do autorów, których kariera rozpoczęła się podczas renesansu maoryskiego. Podobnie jak w przypadku wcześniejszych prac, opowiadania Patricii Grace opublikowane w zbiorze *Small Holes in the Silence: Short Stories* przedstawiają zarys kondycji człowieka we współczesnym świecie, że szczególnym uwzględnieniem społeczności maoryskiej. Opowiadania napisane przez Grace przepełnione są ciszą. Użycie pominięcia i niedopowiedzenia splatają się z wprowadzeniem biernych postaci, których światy wypełnione są tym, co tajemnicze, nieznane lub puste. Grace pozwala czytelnikom rzucić okiem na życie zwykłych Maorysów znajdujących się w sytuacjach zagrożenia.

### **Słowa kluczowe**

cisza, Patricia Grace, komunikacja, Maorysi, opowiadanie

Patricia Grace's career started during the Maori Renaissance – a period of the revival of Maori art and culture in the 1970s (Sinclair 1992: 283, Williams 2006: 208). The movement itself was an important part of the Maori struggle for their own voice, as until then Maori writers had not produced any substantial written texts and the native culture had taken the oral form (Binney 2004: 203-204, Simms 1978: 223). From the period of colonisation until the Maori Renaissance, Maori culture was suppressed and the dominant discourse was that of the Western colonizers:

Until 1970, most of the fiction about the Pacific and Pacific Islanders was written by people living outside the Pacific. It was written from a Eurocentric perspective that depicted Pacific Islanders as exotic, peripheral, "noble," heroic and primitive. That

fiction tended to marginalize Pacific Island peoples and to present them in the roles of spectators and objects of European desires. (Tawake 2000: 155)

According to Mark Williams, “In bicultural New Zealand/Aotearoa Ngata’s legacy has been caught up in debates about the appropriate strategies to adopt towards the dominant culture and the meaning of the ‘Maori Renaissance’” (2006: 208). It was only in the 1970s that Maori writers, including Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera, decided to (re)gain their voice, attempting to deal with the theme of cultural oppression and addressing the issues of Maori people:

The Maori Renaissance was animated exactly by the spirit of “imaginative rediscovery and coherence”, which enabled Maori to see their political stances as legitimate and their view of human experience as a viable alternative to the hegemonic view. It did not cherish a return to a pristine essentialist past, rather a reconsideration of the present that values their heritage and takes into account their own narrative of historical circumstances. (Della Valle 2010: 94-95)

In her various works published from 1975 onwards, Patricia Grace presents the lives of Maori people, their relationship with Pakeha (Europeans) and their struggles with the reality in which they must live. Her position of both a Maori descendant and a writer enables her to present a unique perspective on the condition of Maori people:

Pakeha writers are considered as individuals, but Grace and Ihimaera, much to their individual consternation, are seen as Maori who write rather than as writers who are Maori. Their position as writers allows them to stand aside from the action, while as Maori they can, with some confidence, present the insiders’ point of view. (Sinclair 1992: 284)

In view of the ongoing debate as to who can speak as “the other”, i.e. who can claim the right to call their perspective that of

an insider (see: Stead 1985, Fee 1995), the paper follows the understanding of Margery Fee, who proposes that “writing must somehow promote indigenous access to power without negating indigenous difference” (1995: 245).

As a Maori descendant, Patricia Grace has access to the indigenous world. To use the words of Sandra Tawake, she is “see[ing] with [her] own eyes”, “looking at the world through indigenous eyes” (2000: 156). And indeed, this new perspective has been a breakthrough for the Maori community: Patricia Grace has become the eyes and the voice of the Maori.

Yet, the voice that Patricia Grace is given results in a discourse full of understatement, void and silence. This paper attempts to present the various uses of silence in Grace’s stories included in her latest collection titled *Small Holes in the Silence: Short Stories*, published in 2006. The multitude of the forms that silence takes in the collection, paradoxically as it may seem, enables the Maori community to find their voice.

The title of the latest collection of Patricia Grace’s short stories is a tribute to a Maori poet, also a prominent figure of the Maori Renaissance, Hone Tuwhare (Williams 2006: 206). The exact words “small holes in the silence” are a quotation from a poem titled “Rain” by Tuwhare (Jones 2007: 7). Just like the rain evoked in Tuwhare’s poem, Patricia Grace’s short stories create “small holes in the silence” by narrating the lives of various people. The stories provide a deep insight into a number of basic human feelings. As Lawrence Jones states in his review of the collection, “[Grace’s] stories present a full range of Maori experience” (2007: 7). Rachel Nunns characterizes Grace’s previous collections of stories as “expressing recurring themes and concerns”. According to Nunns, Grace’s stories “inform readers at an emotional, imaginative level with the sense of what it means to be a Maori” (in Jones 2007: 7).

The stories mostly take the form of first-person narrative, although some are told from the perspective of an omniscient narrator. The stories told in the first person provide the readers with a sense of orality of storytelling. For instance, one of

the stories, “Stranger Danger” starts with the words “You won’t like this story” (Grace 2006: 88). Regardless of the narrative mode, all the stories contain apt observations of the surrounding world.

The observations focus on the precarious conditions of ordinary people, mostly members of the Maori community. In “Reading Patricia Grace”, Christina Thompson claims that “[Grace] has always been a quiet but active commentator on social issues relevant to her community and her life” (2009: 38). The stories in the collection indeed focus on such social issues. For instance, the story titled “Curlytop and Ponytail” pictures two girls attempting to care for their irresponsible mother.

Another story focusing on social problems is “Until We Meet Again”. It is written in an elliptical style and begins with a woman joining the narrator on the bus and speculating about the intentions of a couple that she is observing. Her true aim, however, is to verbalise the story of rape and abuse that she was a victim of. She demands to be convinced that she is responsible for the death of her oppressor. It seems that she simply wants to be heard, to make people see that violence is a real problem. Some information is omitted, as the character does not express anything explicitly, therefore the reader is supposed to fill in the unrevealed details. As Raylene Ramsay observes in “Indigenous Women Writers in the Pacific: Déwé Gorodé, Sia Figiel, Patricia Grace: Writing Violence as Counter Violence and the Role of Local Context,” “Grace’s short stories and novels thus touch lightly, allusively on intimate family violence as on the humiliation in women’s daily lives” (2012: 6).

Indeed, the difficult situations of women are what Grace attempts to shed light on. In “Headlights”, a depressed woman leaves behind her harsh life of a single mother. She abandons her family and sets out on a journey without saying a word, trying to convince herself that “there was nothing behind her.

There was nothing back there at all" (Grace 2006: 126). The woman is devoid of emotions, she feels her life has been lost.

"Pa Wars" tells of a woman who decides to conceive a child without being emotionally involved with its father. The story contains the woman's monologue directed at one of her old friends, in which she reveals her plans. The man then volunteers to become the father. "Manners Street Blues" is an account of how brutally a Maori female student is treated by the police only because she protests against the maltreatment of her cousin. The story titled "To Russia with Love" is concerned with the loneliness of an old woman who rents her flat to tourists from New Zealand. The guests are not eager to talk about the past and remain silent about Communism or the Iron Curtain, but they do touch upon the issues of poverty and homelessness. What connects these stories is the focus on women's harsh lives, problems of the contemporary world that they have to tackle, but also the apparent loneliness in facing their difficulties.

A homeless man is also a character of another story, titled "Toasted Sandwich". The man is seen by the narrator when he tries to help a lost girl return to her mother. People pass him by, not reacting to his calls. The narrator helps to walk the girl back to her mother. Moved by the man's reaction, the narrator invites him for coffee. The man is silent, he does not respond to any questions. The conclusion of this story is that actions reveal more than words, which seems to be an overall principle underlying the collection. The man's act of kindness is contrasted with his slovenly appearance. He does not say much, but it is his action that makes the narrator want to stop and help both the girl and him.

The lives which Grace allows us to glimpse are pervaded with silence. This concerns not only the economy of words that she uses and the elliptical character of her storytelling, but also the description of the characters. Some of them are presented as lacking any past, not being able to identify with any story or history, struggling to find their identities. One of such

characters is the grandfather from “Stepping Out”. When the grandma rescues him on the shore, he knows little about himself: only his name and that he is able to work. In “Love Story”, the main character is Willie, a young boy wishing to discover a story that he could relate to. Upon a visit to a marae, a small urban meeting house, where a wise man, genealogist Te Wera Kapi encourages the students to create a relationship between the stories of the carvings and their personal stories, Willie becomes infatuated with a statue and thus finds a way to learn about his past:

Willie didn't know his true name or his story either, so there's a coincidence. And really, all of this falling in love was related to his uncertainty about who he was and where he came from and whether or not he was lovable. He wanted to know that he was lovable, but he hadn't been parented by anyone for long enough to be certain about that. (Grace 2006: 68)

The characters of the story “Stealing Mark” also have difficulties finding their true identities. Mark used to be the narrator's teacher, telling entertaining stories about his past. During the lessons, he described how he was stolen from his family three times: at the time of his birth, then from the hospital and finally his body is stolen after his death. Mark is treated as an object, a trophy to be won by his family. The narrator identifies herself with Mark's story:

I too had been stolen at birth and therefore must have proper parents somewhere in the world who were young and nice. I now understood why I was so white compared to my brothers and sisters, why I was fat while they were thin, and why my pale hair frizzed and their dark hair did not. (Grace 2006: 157)

Grace shows that in the contemporary world, it is not only Maori people who face identity problems. Both Mark and his student lack a sense of belonging. Other people have decided about their future, so they are not able to gain control of their

own lives. Mark's grandparents do not let him live with his parents, then his sons decide upon collecting him from the hospital to finally relocate his body after his death.

Silent and passive characters are also to be found in the story titled "Tommy". The title character "never said much" (Grace 2006: 168) and did not take any action when his wife, Tia, abandoned him for another man. Tia is described as a character who "never discussed anything" (Grace 2006: 169), "couldn't be bothered doing anything" (Grace 2006: 171). She is passive and incapable of developing feelings:

She did act kind of pleased, a bit self-satisfied, but wasn't bursting with anything the way any one of us would have been if we'd been in the centre of Tommy's attention. "He's nice to me," was all she would say, which to us was lukewarm, half-hearted, insufficient and quite maddening. I mean Tommy was nice to everyone. (Grace 2006: 172)

This passage shows that it is not only women who suffer, as good-natured men may also become victims. Tommy is neglected and hurt by his wife, yet he still does not develop negative emotions towards her.

Another issue that Grace addresses is human impenetrability. According to Jones,

[t]wo stories set in Russia, "Doll Woman" and "To Russia with Love", raise the question of "all that we cannot know of each other". A New Zealand tourist muses on a woman seen on the street and sympathised with but not understood. A Russian woman (who has hosted New Zealand tourists) ponders the New Zealand calendars they have sent her but "cannot truly imagine [...] where the people live, or how they live, in such a faraway place" and projects onto the pictures of the birds the sense of danger and uncertainty that she has experienced in her own life. (Jones 2007: 8)

Indeed, no one is thoroughly transparent and we are not able to fathom what people bury deep inside. Faced with the unknown, we tend to create stories to fill in the gaps, hence the

stories about the past of the main character in “Eben” or the game of guessing in “Until We Meet Again”. In the story titled “The Kiss” a rugby player visiting Florence is struck by the view of a woman whose partner rejects her after a kiss. He later finds that it was all pretended as what he saw was only a shooting for a commercial and the affection that he thought the woman felt for the man was only an illusion.

In the collection, there are two stories that deserve further attention in the discussion of silence. One of them is “Busy Lines”. This story focuses on the loss that an old woman suffered when her husband died. The death of the man is only mentioned implicitly, through a metaphor: he went to “stardom” and became a star observing his lonely wife.

The setting is described as empty. As the woman grows older, the appliances gradually disappear:

It could be her husband looking in – fifteen years since he’d gone off to be a star – and if so he would notice most of the furniture had gone. Piece by piece she had given away the big bed, the bedside cabinets, the tallboy and dressing table. It could be him. One small bed and a set of drawers were enough for her. (Grace 2006: 7)

By giving out her goods, she disposes of all material things, thus preparing herself for the moment when she will not need anything. At the end of her life, the woman is surrounded by nothing but silence and stagnation:

She listened this morning, as she waited for daylight under one star observation, for sea sounds, but there were none. There was no movement at all out there, the water being stretched to its edges, she thought, like a whole, black, drum-tight skin. She was certain there were fish in the weed and among the rocks but knew they would not cause a ripple on this still morning. There would be no one coming at daylight – as there had not been anyone for months now, or was it years – row, row in an aluminium dinghy to disturb and entice them, to snatch them and fry them. (Grace 2006: 8)

The world around her becomes quiet, foreshadowing the fate that is to come. The woman's stagnant life is based on a certain pattern: she follows some rituals in her life. She looks after the house and prepares her meals – all to idle away the time.

With a broom you could dawdle away half a morning and before you knew it was time to sit down with a cup of tea and a gingernut biscuit. A gingernut biscuit took a bit of time, was no easy swallow, and it was the same with double-decker cabin bread. She could gnaw away for some time on one of those, sitting in her chair by the window with the heater going in cold weather, or out on her step on warm days wondering what there was to think about or if anything was going to happen. (Grace 2006: 9)

The woman is certainly lonely, as no one comes to visit her any longer and she does not receive any help with the broken appliances. She spends time by herself and is so overwhelmed by the silence around her that she even waits to "become part of silence" (Grace 2006: 9). She longs for human contact:

Sometimes on the way up from the beach with her backpack she would hear the telephone ringing but could never think who might be phoning her. She would hurry up to the house, leaving the backpack on the step, opening the door only to find that the ringing had stopped, or perhaps had never been. It was difficult to tell. [...] Sometimes she thought she could hear chitter-chatter and the dinghy being pulled down to the water, sliding through sand and tumbling over stones. But on looking out she would see that it was tipped over against the fence just where she had left it the last time she's tried moving it. (Grace 2006: 10-11)

With the passage of time and the change of seasons, the woman approaches her own inevitable destiny. Eventually, the readers are presented with a symbolic scene of the woman's death:

In the dark of early morning she opened her eyes to find that the stars had entered her room. There were pinpricks of them all around, one on the end of her bed, other dotted over the walls and ceiling. They winked like scales caught flying in sunlight. They flickered and hummed and began to move, swapping from one spot to another as in a game of Corners. Soon they freed themselves from walls and ceilings and began to swarm and spin and dance in all the spaces of the room, alighting on the bed, on her face, her hands, her hair, resting on her eyes. (Grace 2006: 14)

The woman's death is as calm as her whole life. At this moment she accepts her fate, just as she did throughout her life. She dies unnoticed and alone.

As it has been shown, the plot of the story contains various references to silence. Yet, silence in the text can also be found in the narrative mode. The story is related as a third-person account, by means of external focalization. The woman is never given any voice of her own and her actions are constantly narrated using the camera eye technique. The entire text is descriptive and lacks any dialogue or even monologue. The woman is also unnamed; hence she is devoid of any particular identity. In this manner, Grace makes her character represent the multitude of old and lonely people. According to John B. Beston,

[i]n depicting her Maori characters, Grace is concerned most of all with establishing their common humanity. The activities she characteristically shows them engaged in are cyclic ones associated with the phases of life, familiar to all human beings: pregnancy and birth, schooldays, adolescence, courtship and marriage, aging, dying and death. (1984: 42)

Grace also addresses the omnipresent issue of the disruption of human communication. The title of the story evokes busy telephone lines, supposed to establish a connection between people. But these people reject contact. The phones that the woman hears ring only in her imagination, as none of her relatives wish to maintain contact with her.

Another story deserving analysis here is “Eben”. Jones considers “Eben” to be “the strongest story in the volume” (2007: 8). And indeed, the story provides a compelling account of the life and death of a misshapen, rejected boy living in an orphanage. As not much is known, people invent stories about the reasons of his disability. Nobody is willing to help him, but Eben eventually finds a home with a woman called Pani:

Pani [...] had spent twenty years living in the same orphanage. It was the only place she had been able to call home, and though not all memories of it were good she had some affection for the place and knew what it meant to have someone visit now and again. She found in this crooked boy, who had been named George by those who had registered him, a kind of kindred spirit. The name George, she thought, was disrespectful to the boy, being given to him because of the death of the king at the time he entered the orphanage. Staff sometimes referred to him as King George, and knowing the ways of some people of the institution, she knew the name had been given to him as a joke. (Grace 2006: 45)

Pani’s story seems to parallel that of Eben’s, just as in “Stealing Mark” the narrator’s story is compared to Mark’s fate. Despite having been given a proper name, Pani describes herself as being “left, not chosen” (Grace 2006: 46). Full of compassion for the maltreatment of the boy, Pani decides to steal Eben and escape with him to another town. The boy is considered a burden for any institution, so they are not sought. Eben is mute, he does not possess the ability to speak, yet he is a brilliant listener and he gradually develops a passion for music. After his foster mother dies, Eben starts performing in the streets – he attempts to dance, but his movements are ridiculous and the passers-by either laugh or stare at him. Eventually, Eben dies similarly to his whole life – in silence:

One Saturday morning, just as the market was closing down prior to the regular shops opening, Eben fell dead curled round his transistor. Stall holders were taking down canopies, lugging box-

es, loading trucks and vans, filling bags, folding tables, piling roof-racks, starting motors, driving off. No one noticed Eben until the shopkeeper, whose doorway Eben was curled in, came to open up his shop. He had to step over the dead man in order to get inside and use the telephone. (Grace 2006: 57)

As in “Busy Lines”, the character dies unnoticed by anybody. Death, according to Grace, is thus not viewed as an important event in the contemporary world. Life is no longer a precious value to be cherished, as people have stopped caring about each other.

However, not all the stories presented by Patricia Grace are kept in the realistic mode. In the collection, Grace relies not only on New Zealand mythology, but also on Maori beliefs. With the use of a distinctly Maori mode, Grace draws the readers’ attention to the Maori issue even more persistently. As Adrienne E. Gavin claims, “[Grace] weaves Maori mythology and storytelling into a contemporary plot that contrasts old Maori ways with the new” (2008: 419). According to Jones, “Moon Story” and “Flash Story” “translate the traditional tales of Rona and the moon and of Tuwhaki [sic!] into contemporary idiom and concepts” (2007: 8).

“Moon Story” is set soon after a conflict between two tribes. The women are busy restoring the households when Rona decides to bring water. On her way, she trips and falls down. She curses the Moon for her accident, as a consequence of which the Moon kidnaps Rona and places her in its window. The story presents the manner in which Maori people understand the occurrences in their lives – be that good or evil – as a natural part of their lives. Rona accepts her fate, so does her family, in a way all Maori do.

“Flash Story” is a parable abundant in magical elements. It tells of Tawhaki who cannot find his place in the world because of his being different: “[i]t was really the underarm lightning which caused him problems from the time when he was a child, marking him out as being different and not quite belonging, someone who must be from another realm” (Grace

2006: 186). The story is based on the myth of Ponaturi, hostile goblins, who killed the father of the adventurer. At the end of the story, Tawhaki understands that he is the only person to decide about his life and find his own place of belonging.

As Jones notices, also the story titled “Stepping Out” evokes the idea of “the odd, the weird, or the supernatural” as a part of Maori lives (2007: 8). The grandfather is described as having a double self:

It was when she let go of his feet that she saw the other one of him, rising up, standing tall and naked and glistening. This other one began stepping backwards on high-stepping feet, tipping his head from side to side, widening his eyes at her, eyes which gleamed like shells. (Grace 2006: 23)

Apparently, the grandmother saves the man from dying upon their first meeting as the double self is also visible at his death as an old man.

Paola Della Valle offers a commentary on the use of supernatural elements, underlining that it is a prominent characteristic in Grace’s writing. In her opinion, the elements of the extraordinary emphasise the Maori reliance on spirituality as a binding force for the community. As she claims, Grace’s fiction is

[e]voking a paradigmatic world where humans, nature and inanimate objects interact and are all attributed spiritual qualities. The account of dreams, premonitions and extraordinary events is seen as the character’s ability to communicate with and participate in a larger spiritual reality. (Della Valle 2010: 108)

To conclude, Patricia Grace’s collection of stories titled *Small Holes in the Silence: Short Stories* is a poignant overview on the condition of humanity. Grace’s stories allow the reader to encounter a variety of human problems and present a world where silence and voice intertwine.

After years of colonial repression of the Maori voice, Grace attempts to show Maori community as diverse, defying unification and objectivisation. As Jones claims, “[t]he stories focus on Maori life as subjectively experienced, not as conceptually analysed” (2007: 7). Grace’s voice is a voice from the inside, even if her stories take the form of third person narration – the narrator comes from within the community.

The lives of Maori people are still pervaded with silence, as they retain a memory of colonial exploitation. The stories titled “To Russia with Love” and “Doll Woman” are meant to underline the parallelisms of the repressive situations in the countries where people’s voice was silenced. The violence that is shown in “Until We Meet Again” is also aimed to underline the need to take revenge for the past abuse. The collection itself reminds of the abuse, of the silencing of Maori people who still remember their humiliation.

“In the oral form of telling history, the narrative belongs to the narrator” (Binney 2004: 210). As Grace’s collection evokes the sense of orality of the stories told/written in it, Binney’s assertion is valid for this work, too. The stories conform to the principles of Maori tradition: the history of Maori people is remembered by means of retelling the personal stories of specific characters, very often endowed with magical attributes. Even if they provide subjective accounts of a person’s life, the stories still serve as examples of general rules governing the Maori world and can be seen as universal.

Interestingly, even if the story itself is not set in New Zealand, characters that Grace focuses her attention on are mostly native inhabitants of New Zealand. The short stories are set in a realistic mode, but also contain elements of the supernatural, which adds to the complexity of the presentation of Maori experience. It is the issues of this society in particular that Grace attempts to shed light on, enabling the indigenous people of New Zealand to be heard about.

## References

- Beston, John B. (1984). "The fiction of Patricia Grace". *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 15/2: 41-53. Also available at <<https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ariel/article/viewFile/32747/26799>>. Accessed 1 August 2016.
- Binney, Judith (2004). "Maori oral narratives, Pakeha written texts: Two forms of telling history". *New Zealand Journal of History* 38/2: 204-214. Also available at <[http://www.nzjh.auckland.ac.nz/docs/2004/NZJH\\_38\\_2\\_06.pdf](http://www.nzjh.auckland.ac.nz/docs/2004/NZJH_38_2_06.pdf)>. Accessed 1 August 2016.
- Della Valle, Paola (2010). *From Silence to Voice: The Rise of Maori Literature*. Auckland: Libro International.
- Fee, Margery (1995). "Who can write as other?" In: Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin (eds.). *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 242-245.
- Gavin, Adrienne E. (2008). "Grace, Patricia (1937- )". In: Donald Haase (ed.). *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales: G-P*. London: Greenwood Publishing, 419.
- Grace, Patricia (2006). *Small Holes in the Silence: Short Stories*. Auckland: Penguin.
- Jones, Lawrence (2007). "Ironic projections". *New Zealand Books* 17/4: 7-8. Also available at <<https://nzbooks.org.nz/2007/literature/ironic-projections-lawrence-jones/>>. Accessed 10 July 2016.
- Ramsay, Raylene (2012). "Indigenous women writers in the Pacific: Déwé Gorodé, Sia Figiel, Patricia Grace: Writing violence as counter violence and the role of local context". *Postcolonial Text* 7/1: 1-18. Also available at <<http://postcolonial.univ-paris13.fr/index.php/pct/article/viewFile/1199/1300>>. Accessed 30 September 2017.
- Simms, Norman (1978). "Maori literature in English: An introduction". *World Literature Today* 52/2: 223-228. Also available at <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40132747>>. Accessed 1 August 2016.
- Sinclair, Karen P. (1992). "Maori literature: Protest and affirmation". *Pacific Studies* 15/4: 283-309.
- Stead, C. K. (1985). "Keri Hulme's 'The Bone People' and the Pegasus Award for Maori literature". *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 16/4: 102. Also available at <<http://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ariel/article/download/32883/26933>>. Accessed 3 August 2016.

- Tawake, Sandra (2000). "Transforming the insider-outsider perspective: Postcolonial fiction from the Pacific". *The Contemporary Pacific* 12/1: 155-175. Also available at <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23717484>>. Accessed 3 August 2016.
- Thompson, Christina (2009). "Reading Patricia Grace". *World Literature Today* 83/3: 37-39. Also available at <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20621588>>. Accessed 3 August 2016.
- Tuwhare, Hone (1994). "Rain". In: *Deep River Talk: Collected Poems*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 46.
- Williams, Mark (2006). "The long Maori renaissance". In: Brenda Deen Schildgen (ed.). *Other Renaissances: A New Approach to World Literature*. Gordonsville: Palgrave Macmillan, 207-226.

Ewa Kroplewska  
Filologiczne Studium Doktoranckie  
Uniwersytet Gdańskiego  
Wita Stwosza 51  
80-308 Gdańsk  
Poland  
[ewa.kroplewska@gmail.com](mailto:ewa.kroplewska@gmail.com)



**Between lawfulness and lawlessness:  
The conceptual boundary between the system  
and the individual in Richard Wright's *Native Son***

JUSTYNA STIEPANOW

*Received 23.04.2017,  
received in revised form 23.10.2017,  
accepted 9.11.2017.*

**Abstract**

This paper explores the impact of the conceptual boundary created by the notions of lawfulness and lawlessness on the individual. Law in Western culture is a goal-oriented instrument of state. The legal limits established in legislative acts and judicial decisions delineate a territory for potential action. As a normative domain, law guides human conduct in the process of individual practical reasoning. In states where codes and statutes go against natural human inclinations, individuals view the conceptual boundary of law as a challenge, which leads to conflicts between the system and the individual. I analyze such a conflict in the personal narrative of Bigger Thomas, the main protagonist in Richard Wright's *Native Son*. The growing tension caused by the discriminatory system of Jim Crow laws ends in the character crossing legal- and custom-determined boundaries.

**Key words**

Jim Crow laws, legal positivism, morality, natural law, natural rights, racism, Richard Wright

**Pojęcia czynu zgodnego z prawem i czynu zabronionego.  
Konceptualna granica pomiędzy systemem a jednostką  
w powieści Richarda Wrighta *Native Son***

**Abstrakt**

Artykuł dotyczy zagadnienia metaforycznej granicy, jaka tworzy się między pojęciami czynu zgodnego z prawem a czynu zabronionego. Prawo w kulturze zachodniej jest instrumentem władzy nastawionym na osiągnięcie celu. Ograniczenia ustanowione w czynnościach legislacyjnych lub przez wykładnię przepisów prawa tworzą terytorium do potencjalnego działania. Jako domena normatywna prawo kieruje ludzkim zachowaniem poprzez proces praktycznego rozumowania. W systemach, w których prawo zostało ustanowione w sprzeczności z prawem naturalnym, ta metaforyczna granica staje się wyzwaniem dla jednostki i prowadzi do jej konfliktu z państwem. Artykuł zgłębia ten konflikt z punktu widzenia osobistej narracji Biggera Thomasa, głównego bohatera powieści Richarda Wrighta pt. *Native Son*. Rosnące napięcie powodowane przez dyskryminacyjny system praw Jima Crowa prowadzi do tego, że Bigger przekracza granice wyznaczone przez amerykańskie prawo i obyczaje.

**Słowa kluczowe**

moralność, pozytywizm prawny, prawa Jima Crowa, prawa naturalne, prawo naturalne, rasizm, Richard Wright

**1. Introduction**

Rousseau begins *The Social Contract* with the words: "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains" (1762: 2) highlighting the main conflict of the Occident – the desire for freedom clashing with the necessity to function within the limits of conventions. The specific significance of these boundaries is acquired when they are qualified by an adjective: political, geographical, cultural, mental, to name a few. Established by varying social facts, some boundaries are custom-related, while others are determined by prejudices. At times, laws are drafted

which are characterized by an obvious moral ambivalence: they discriminate one social group in order to guarantee the dominance of another. My contention is that in unjust statutes the metaphorical line running between the concepts of lawfulness and lawlessness forms a conceptual boundary and leads to a conflict between the system and the individual. Referring to discriminatory segregation laws in twentieth-century America, I analyze Richard Wright's *Native Son* to demonstrate how the dichotomy is conveyed as a restraining force: limiting personal freedom, it inspires the main protagonist to cross the boundary in an act of defiance.

## **2. *Native Son* literary criticism**

The novel at the centre of my analysis is a popular subject of research and critique. To start with the earliest and most prominent of Wright's critics, James Baldwin ("Everybody's Protest Novel" 1955) challenges Wright's agenda by claiming that each protest novel legitimizes the logic it aims to denounce, for in order to fight collective norms one must first consider them valid. Hence, Baldwin recognizes, as I do, that laws, morals, or rationalizing logic become binding only when individually accepted; however, he does so only to make a point without exploring the codes' normative nature. Dorothy S. Redden (1976) and Robert James Butler (1984) highlight in their argument the narrative instances in *Native Son* that I, too, find important, yet for different reasons and to varying conclusions. Furthermore, Anthony Reed's essay (2012) broadly discusses the territorial boundaries visible in Wright's depiction of racially divided Chicago and mentions the social implications resulting from the civic sub-status of African-Americans, yet fails to investigate the jurisprudential origins of such a status quo.

The themes of these investigations are often consistent with the perspective considered in this paper, while their methodologies as well as conclusions differ. To the best of my

knowledge, no published criticism has made an attempt to link law – its bounding force and territorial nature – with the geopolitics and psychology of *Native Son*. The literary contribution to understanding the functioning and the letter of law has been investigated by scholars of the Law and Literature movement.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, exploring the social and cultural significance of American segregation laws through the African-American literary corpus seems to be outside the movement's scope.

As to literary critique, two scholars come very close to my conclusions in their analyses; both explore the psychological level of the novel. Robert Stanton (1969) investigates the moral dimension of Wright's narrative. He discusses the social requirement to live in accord with the moral law in terms of imprisonment and sees the murders described in the novel as outrageous attempts to break free from moral constraints (1969: 56, 57). Sheldon Brivic's (1974) argument is built around the conflict of values he discerns in the novel. I occasionally refer to *Native Son* scholarship – particularly to the work of Brivic or Stanton – to indicate those instances of criticism intersecting with my argument, pointing to both similarities and differences.

### **3. Law's normative function and its boundaries**

My argument is grounded in three assumptions. First, law is the chief normative domain in Western culture. In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau notes that: "the laws of justice [...] merely make for the good of the wicked and the undoing of the just, when the just man observes them towards everybody and nobody observes them towards him. Conventions and laws are therefore needed to join rights to duties and refer justice to its

---

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose statement of the movement see Richard A. Posner's "Law and literature: A relation reargued" in *Virginia Law Review* 72/6: 1351-1392; for more information on the connection between law and literature see the movement's scholarly journal *Law and Literature*, previously titled *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature*.

object" (1762: 27). That is to say: in pursuit of social peace, law is a safeguard mechanism providing an incentive for the immoral and guiding their conduct. Hence, rules regulate, constrict, and allow. Consequently, it can be said that law performs the function of maintaining territorial imperatives, as does the border in its geopolitical dimension. There seems to be a metaphorical affinity between law and border, which takes me to my second assertion: the concept of law is construed in terms of territory with legislative acts establishing its metaphorical boundaries.<sup>2</sup>

Third, any constraint of law is a constraint on an individual psyche. To enforce a state of social order, law must be binding on its subjects. Legal philosophers differ in explaining the social phenomenon of obedience; nevertheless, they all agree that the faculty of practical reason is the condition to abide by the law. If law is ultimately validated in the individual process of practical reasoning, one may choose not to observe it. For instance, the utilitarians acknowledge that disobeying unfair or inefficient law is justified (Green 2009: §2). In the same vein, Hart (1955) holds that there is merely a *prima facie* obligation to obey law, grounded in the rule's fairness but also limited by it. What follows, a legislator sets boundaries for citizens, yet the metaphorical line drawn between the lawful and the unlawful regulates, constricts, and allows certain potentiality that must be recognized by an individual before it is acted on.

---

<sup>2</sup> I find the evidence of the conceptual metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) LAW IS A TERRITORY in the following common expressions: law can be *narrowly or broadly construed*; law *has been stretched* to prosecute a certain violation; intellectual property law *draws boundaries* around human creativity; violators will be prosecuted *to the fullest extent of the law*; someone is *above the law* or *beyond the reach of law*; or someone has acted either *within their rights* or *acts outside of law*; a certain action will be prosecuted *under the Espionage Act* etc.

#### 4. Natural law, positive law, and morality

The term *law* has been used in a general manner so far. At this point, however, it is crucial to select the particular definitions of law that are further referred to. Instead of one law, there are different areas and, more importantly, varying philosophies of law. Consequently, the crucial philosophical questions: What is law and what are the criteria for legal validity? can be answered in more than one way, each time demarcating a different territory. I restrict my argument to certain aspects of natural law and to legal positivism, for I find the contention between these legal traditions to be of the same nature as the tension between individual freedom and authority.

Natural law is a set of universally valid norms determined by the human inclination to live in society. Naturalists argue that there are rational objective moral limits to legislative acts. Natural law interests me only due to its almost one-to-one overlap with *morality* defined as a universally shared body of standards underlying human coexistence. By contrast, in the positive law tradition “law is a matter of what has been posited (ordered, decided, practiced, tolerated, etc.); [...] positivism is the view that law is a social [not natural] construction” (Green 2009). Despite differences, these two traditions have some common ground: natural law (moral) postulates can become posited legal norms, but only through a legislative process.

The inclusion of morality in posited law is thus acknowledged, yet both camps seem to define the concept differently. Whereas naturalists argue for *universal morality*, positivists hold that law may reflect a *morality shared within a society*. One of the contentions of the Separability Thesis<sup>3</sup> reads: “the best explanation for a society’s laws includes reference to the moral ideals current in that society” (Green 2009). The claim allows into law what John Austin calls *positive morality* –

---

<sup>3</sup> The Separability Thesis argues (1) that law and morality are separate and distinct concepts and (2) that the legal validity of a norm is not necessarily determined by its moral content. The Overlap Thesis, on the other hand, presupposes a necessary link between law and morality.

moral customs practiced by the society in question along with the opinions and prejudices held by this society (Green 2009: §4.2). Another notion of *morality*, again differently construed, appears in Lon L. Fuller's *The Morality of Law* (1964). Fuller argues for the *procedural naturalism* of legal systems – law's internal morality that lies in its essentially purposive character. First, law's objectives – social order and guiding human behavior – are morally valuable. Second, to achieve these goals, law must conform to eight minimal principles of legality, the internal consistency between laws within a legal system being one of them.<sup>4</sup> Together, the morally charged purpose of law and its inner procedural coherence equate in Fuller's view to the natural (in the sense of innate) morality of law.

I have outlined two theories of jurisprudence: natural law and legal positivism. The latter is recognized in political science, while the former, less significant to this field, still plays a prominent role in philosophical discourses on ethics. Both share a number of principles and thus their territories overlap, but only to a certain extent. More importantly, the boundaries of these territories run along the same binaries of lawfulness and lawlessness, yet each time they include (or exclude) different principles. I now examine how these conflicting value systems work in practice, reading Richard Wright's *Native Son* against the background of American segregation laws.

## 5. The ethics of American segregation laws

Ambiguous as it sounds, the American legal system tainted by the Jim Crow laws<sup>5</sup> could be arguably seen as moral, at least

---

<sup>4</sup> Fuller (1965) claims that maintaining social order is law's essential function. To perform it, a rule must be: (1) sufficiently general; (2) publicly promulgated; (3) prospective in effect; (4) clear and intelligible; (5) consistent; (6) within the powers of the affected parties; (7) constant through time; and (8) administered in a manner congruent with its wording.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Crow laws were statutes enacted by the state or local governments in the South in reaction to the so-called Reconstruction Amendments to the U.S. Constitution: the Thirteenth Amendment (1865) that proscribed slavery; the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) containing the Equal Protection Clause

according to Fuller's and Austin's theories. In the light of Fuller's *procedural naturalism*, the natural law doctrines of the Declaration of Independence can be found compliant with the legal separation of races. Fuller's principle of consistency was satisfied through the legal doctrine "separate but equal", which provided the legal justification for the Jim Crow laws until 1954, when the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was issued.

Confirming the doctrine in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), a landmark constitutional law case challenging the Louisiana Separate Car Act under the Equal Protection Clause, Justice Henry Billings Brown held that by enacting segregation laws, the State remained within its constitutional boundaries:

The object of the [fourteenth] amendment was undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law, but, in the nature of things, it could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon color, or to enforce social, as distinguished from political, equality, or a commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either. (Brown 163 U.S. 537)

A number of points in this fragment reflect the logic of Fuller and Austin. First, fighting social inequality is not an issue to be addressed by the judiciary: constitutional law provides its subjects with equal political rights not equal social status. Second, the same can be said about promoting racial integration. Hence, as far as internal consistency is concerned, Louisiana state legislators did not violate the Fourteenth Amend-

---

that granted Blacks full citizenship; and the Fifteenth Amendment (1870) that prohibited the federal and state governments from disenfranchisement. Hence, no law could deny African-Americans their civil rights. However, there was no constitutional limit as to how local governments could regulate access to these entitlements. As such, the Southern state legislators (exercising their constitutional right to self-government) enacted a number of laws that systematically denied Blacks equal access to public services and education (segregation laws), or to vote registration (literacy tests, poll taxes, grandfather clauses). The Jim Crow laws were drafted to revive the Southern Black Codes that had restricted the civil liberties of African-Americans in the post-Civil War years. They were finally overruled by two federal bills: the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Right Act (1965).

ment: they provided public services to both races. Third, Brown refers to the cultural concept of race built on claims of alleged biological discrepancies (“distinctions based upon color”) and the unwillingness of the communities to mingle. Thus he acknowledges that the racial prejudices and social standards of the slavery era were moral customs actually practiced in Louisiana and, as such, possible as a source of law. In short, Brown subscribes to Austin’s theory of *positive morality*.

## **6. Notions of right and wrong in American *positive morality***

The boundaries of law I am interested in are state-made (posit-ed law). They stake out a territory where an individual may be forced to live against his/her nature. The crimes of Bigger Thomas, the main protagonist in *Native Son*, are the result of functioning within such boundaries. Wright conveys the territorialism of American post-slavery laws on a number of levels. The first aspect is physical: he depicts a city divided between two races. The second level is social: the interaction between these communities reveals a strained relationship and allows the reader to grasp its social gravity. Collective in nature, both aspects lack an individual perspective; hence, I only mention them without giving more details. The third level is ethical: Wright offers a moral evaluation and prepares the ground for the psychological dimension of the novel.

In “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born”, mocking the *positive morality* of the South as incongruent with the Creator’s “unalienable Rights” (as phrased by the Framers), Wright comes back to his childhood experiences: “In Dixie, there are two worlds, the white world and the black world, [...] there are [...] white churches and black churches, [...] and, for all I know, a white God and a black God” (1940: xi). The hypocrisy of a religious devotion that, nevertheless, does not exclude diehard racism within the Bible Belt is evident in these words: the oxymoronic co-existence of two Gods within a monotheistic faith reflects

the contradiction. If, as Thomas Jefferson put it, “all men are created equal” and endowed by God with natural rights, the double standard of American *positive morality*, along with the denial of those most fundamental rights to African-Americans, must be seen as incongruent with the very standard on which the country was built, let alone with the moral content of God’s teachings.

In the same vein but more explicitly, Wright outlines a vision of America as a state founded on unjust laws through the words of Bigger’s defense attorney, Max. Redden, too, discusses the same narrative instance, without, however, recognizing its jurisprudential anchorage.<sup>6</sup> The utterance lies at the heart of my analysis: I see it as the most accurate diagnosis of the Jim Crow laws. Max builds the closing arguments around what he calls the “first wrong” (1940: 357) upon which the whole system was later constructed as legally valid. This “first wrong” – the assumption that the black race, as subhuman, has no rights<sup>7</sup> – became a law; observing it was right. The reversal, as Max argues, has been rationalized: “Let us not be naïve: men do what they must, even when they feel that they are fulfilling the will of God” (1940: 359). Further, he unravels the logic of the system built on slavery that was perpetuated in the form of the Jim Crow laws pointing out the morality practiced by the white community: “Men adjust themselves to their land; they create their own laws of being; their notions of right and wrong” (1940: 360). The order of objects in this utterance

---

<sup>6</sup> According to Redden, Max does not employ the “first wrong” to place the blame for Bigger’s crimes on the system. Neither does he do so to voice his moral outrage or inspire pity for Black Americans. Redden believes that Max simply aims at tracing back historically the reasons for forming a particular kind of mindset in order to establish “the long chain of causation” for Bigger’s alienation and anti-social attitude (1976: 114). Consequently, the moral ambivalence of American posited law remains inexplicit in the background of her argument.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), the U.S. Supreme Court held that “A [...] negro of the African race, whose ancestors were brought to this country and sold as slaves, is not a ‘citizen’ within the meaning of the Constitution of the United States” (60 U.S. 393). As such, all African Americans, whether free or enslaved, were denied standing to sue in federal court.

– land, laws of being, notions of right and wrong – follows the principle of cause and effect: first there is a purpose – control over a territory; then establishment of the laws that safeguard the interests of the controllers; and the final step – making anew the notions of right and wrong, that is, establishing mental boundaries for the controlled. In short, Max argues that a system built on injustice can be legal in the light of positivism, yet its adapted (hence unnatural, not universal) morality is open to question.

As an instrument, posited law is used to an end other than, as Fuller argues, the moral end of safeguarding social order by guiding human behavior. Therefore, by unraveling geographical and economic dominance as the origin of normative institutions, Wright points to their moral ambivalence to begin with.

## **7. Denying natural rights**

The final level which conveys the territorialism of the Jim Crow laws in *Native Son*, distinguishing this novel from many others, is psychological: Wright's narrator shows the fictional world through Bigger's psyche, with all the psychological limitations imposed on his race by the system through its normative institutions. To see Wright's plot as an example of the crossing of law-determined boundaries, one has to read it as an account of emotional tension between an individual, Bigger Thomas, and the state, white America with its positive law keeping races apart physically and, more significantly, psychologically. Thus the other way to view the territorialism of these codes is to see their profound effect on the way in which each African-American perceived himself/herself.

Perhaps the greatest revelation the audience has while reading *Native Son* is the discovery of Bigger's alienation from his own people: his life is deprived of the most fundamental natural rights – a sense of belonging and kinship. Consulting with Max in the midst of the trial, Bigger confesses that he hates

and fears his own race as much as white men. Left alone in his cell Bigger, for the first time, longs for a “response of recognition, [...] union, identity; [...] a supporting oneness, a wholeness which had been denied him all his life” (1940: 335). Bigger’s alienation from his own people, fiercely criticized by Baldwin (1955),<sup>8</sup> is a byproduct of systematic racial discrimination. In my opinion, Bigger’s state of mind in this matter conveys, most powerfully though perhaps not in the most immediate fashion, the immense psychological force of American posited law achieved by its indissoluble internal coherence.

To continue in the same vein, another natural right denied to Bigger is, in egalitarian terms, his equality in fundamental worth. Wright frequently stresses that one of the consequences of racial oppression is self-loathing and an overwhelming feeling of inferiority. The reader learns how deeply a lack of self-worth has been drilled into Bigger’s psyche, reading about his interaction with the Daltons: Bigger never speaks spontaneously, replies only in monosyllables, his gaze fixed on the floor. The feeling of inadequacy never leaves him. On his way to see Henry Dalton for a job, Bigger stands in front of the Daltons’ residence confused as to whether he should enter the house through the front door and, at the same time, aware that if he takes too long to make up his mind he is bound to be arrested as a potential burglar. Bigger is uncomfortable with the personal questions posed by Mary and Jan: he takes their interest and kindness for mockery.

In fact, narrative instances such as the scene juxtaposing Mary’s absolute confidence with Bigger’s constant feeling of inadequacy or confessions made to Max contribute most to the reader’s understanding of how crushing the grip of segregation laws was on the Black individual. Thus, it is the psychological dimension of Wright’s prose that conveys the force of Jim Crow better than the exposition of the system presented by Max. The

---

<sup>8</sup> Bigger’s lack of ethnic solidarity is the subject of Baldwin’s harshest criticism (“Many Thousands Gone” 1955). In his opinion, Wright fails to present his protagonist as a realistic believable symbol of his own people by denying him any relationship with them.

system with its hostile legal- and custom-determined boundaries has a still greater impact on Bigger than only playing havoc with his self-confidence. Being an object not a subject for the white race, he soon begins to think of himself as one. He confesses to Max:

You just keep moving all the time, doing what other folks say. You ain't a man no more. You just work day in and day out so the world can roll on and other people can live. [...] [White folks] own everything. [...] They don't even let you feel what you want to feel. (1940: 326-7)

The sense of agency is an essential condition of humanness, born out of a feeling of control over one's life. Thus another natural right denied to Bigger is his right to be human. Bigger has been deprived of freedom to shape his destiny and consequently has been stripped of his humanness. Paradoxically, he seeks to regain control in crossing the metaphorical lines drawn by law.

## **8. Crime as a free choice**

The murders of Mary Dalton and Bessie Mears are typically seen by scholars as a turning point in the narrative. For instance, Brivic interprets Bigger's crimes as "act[s] of rebellion" and the result of the intensifying struggle that he identifies as Bigger's internal fight, and not as a conflict between the system and the individual (1974: 234). Certainly, transgressing the boundaries of the Jim Crow laws in deliberate unlawful conduct born out of frustration is what inspired Wright to create his main protagonist. In "How 'Bigger' Was Born", he enumerates the individuals whose qualities were transmitted to Bigger Thomas:

And then there was Bigger No. 4, whose only law was death. The Jim Crow laws of the south were not for him. But as he laughed and cursed and broke them, he knew that someday he'd have to

pay for his freedom. His rebellious spirit made him violate all the taboos and consequently he always oscillated between moods of intense elation and depression. He was never happier than when he had outwitted some foolish custom, and he was never more melancholy than when brooding over the impossibility of his ever being free. (1940: x)

Bigger No. 4 is one of many African-American boys whose open defiance filled the young Wright with a mixture of fear and admiration. Functioning within a territory limited by law and custom where compliance was a must, the only free choice African-Americans had was to act against reason and the instinct of self-preservation – crossing the boundaries of law and showing nonchalance instead of the expected submission. Not surprisingly then, Bigger inherits this quality to some extent.

Stanton finds in Wright's narrative the following argument: "to be a good person, one must first be a person; [...] to become a person one has to act; [...] the morality imposed upon Bigger confines him to shame-ridden non-existence by prohibiting any significant act – except crime" (1969: 56). I find his diagnosis accurate in all parts but one – it is not *morality* that ties Bigger down; it is the law embodying the *positive morality* of a racially prejudiced society.<sup>9</sup> Weary of the inaction forced on him by law and custom, Bigger considers felony. Stanton terms these instances "fancies of power" (1969: 53), as if crossing legal boundaries could compensate for disenfranchisement:

They had the feeling that the robbing of Blum's would be a violation of the ultimate taboo; it would be a trespassing into territory where the full wrath of an alien white world would be turned loose

<sup>9</sup> Stanton pursues his argument from a starting point marked by what he calls (in rather general terms) "moral law", equating the concept with "traditional Christian ethics" (1969: 53). A detailed explanation of what he means by *morality*, based either on ethics or jurisprudence, is missing from his analysis. Consequently, he misses the contradiction between *morality* as defined by Naturalists and *positive morality* and fails to notice that the situation of Black Americans of the post-slavery era was unique because great moral ambivalence was allowed into the system by the law itself.

upon them; in short, it would be a symbolic challenge of the white's world's rule over them; a challenge which they yearned to make, but were afraid to. (1940: 18)

Wright uses the territory metaphor to stress that robbing a white shop owner is, apart from violating the criminal code, an offense against social norms. Hence, "trespassing into the White world" signifies crossing the metaphorical barrier erected to strengthen the psychological sense of inferiority the segregation laws produced in African-Americans.

Interestingly, when the boys abandon the plan of robbing Blum, it is for fear of the vigilante justice of his gun rather than of legal sanctions. Statutory punishments in the America of the 1930's were harsh (especially for interracial offences); still, the criminal-justice system operated within fixed boundaries. There were no limits, however, to extrajudicial or self-defense measures, all likely to escape prosecution. The fear of white men's violent responses is the novel's main theme: Bigger is motivated by it throughout the entire plot, particularly when he smothers Mary. All the crimes he commits afterwards have a mark of practical reasoning in the detachment of his humane self that, nevertheless, exists. Explaining to Max the exhilarating effect the acts had upon him, Bigger admits: "For a while I was free. I was doing something. It was wrong, but I was feeling all right" (1940: 328). Similar to his prototypes from "How 'Bigger' Was Born," he finds freedom in crossing legal and moral boundaries:

Had he done what they thought he never could? His being black and at the bottom of the world was something which he could take with a new born strength. [...] The feeling of being always enclosed in the stifling embrace of an invisible force had gone from him. [...] His body felt free and easy now. (1940: 141-2)

In other words, the crimes are Bigger's way out of the inertia forced on him by customs, and, as many *Native Son* scholars claim, they have a defining significance. Butler, for instance,

sees the killings as a way of achieving independence in a reality marked by economic, social and political exclusion (1984: 103). Also Brivic notes that the killings and their aftermath result in a phenomenal change in Bigger: “He has gone from slave to master, from a complete social liability to a dynamic managerial executive” (1974: 235). He writes about “regeneration through violence” (1974: 235) and suggests that the savage means of Bigger’s rebirth directly reflect the brutal reality of the post-slavery era (1974: 237). While I agree with Brivic on the direction of the change in Bigger, I differ on what triggered the crimes. I claim that it is not only the opportunity to re-enact the physical violence inflicted on his people that has a purifying effect on Bigger. Crossing the conceptual boundary delineated by the codes in order to defy the psychological oppression of morally ambivalent law is, at least, equally significant.

## **9. Conclusion**

Summing up, law is a fundamental point of reference in Western culture: what is allowed or forbidden is stipulated in statutes which reflect society’s prejudices and customs. The metaphorical line between the concepts of lawfulness and lawlessness posited in legislative acts creates a conceptual boundary demarcating the territory for potential action. Law, as a goal-oriented instrument of governance, at times fails to provide an even-handed standard for all its subjects, creating tension between the individual and the system. Wright’s *Native Son* is a remarkable example of such a conflict. Under the rule of the Jim Crow laws, justified by a positive morality grounded in racial prejudice, Wright’s protagonist – Bigger Thomas – is deprived of his most fundamental natural rights: a sense of belonging and kinship, freedom of choice, and his humanness. Bigger’s growing frustration at his inert, locked-in existence leads him, therefore, to cross all boundaries and commit violent crimes.

## References

- Baldwin, James (1984 [1955]). "Everybody's Protest Novel". In: *Notes of a Native Son*. Boston: Bacon Press.
- Baldwin, James (1984 [1955]). "Many Thousands Gone". In: *Notes of a Native Son*. Boston: Bacon Press.
- Brivic, Sheldon (1974). "Conflict of values: Richard Wright's *Native Son*". *Novel: A Forum of Fiction* 7/3: 231-245.
- Butler, Robert James (1984). "Wright's *Native Son* and two novels by Zola: A comparative study". *Black American Literature Forum* 18/3: 100-105.
- Dred Scott v. Sandford. 60 U.S. 393 (1857).
- Fuller, Lon L. (1969 [1964]). *The Morality of Law*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Green, Leslie (2009). "Legal positivism". In: Edward N. Zalta (ed.). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/legal-positivism/>>. Accessed 12 April 2017.
- Hart, H. L. A. (1955). "Are there any natural rights?". *The Philosophical Review* 6/2: 175-191.
- Lakoff, George, Mark Johnson (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Plessy v. Ferguson. 163 U.S. 537 (1896).
- Redden, Dorothy S. (1976). "Richard Wright and *Native Son*: Not guilty". *Black American Literature Forum* 10/4: 111-116.
- Reed, Anthony (2012). "Another map of the south side": *Native Son* as postcolonial novel". *African American Review* 45/4: 603-615.
- Rousseau, Jean Jacques (1973 [1762]). *The Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right*. Trans. G. D. H. Cole. London: J. M. Dent & Sons.
- Stanton, Robert (1969). "Outrageous fiction: *Crime and Punishment*, *The Assistant*, and *Native Son*". *Pacific Coast Philology* 4: 52-58.
- Wright, Richard (1969 [1940]). *Native Son*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Wright, Richard (1969). "How 'Bigger' Was Born". In: *Native Son*. New York: Harper & Row.

Justyna Stiepanow  
Filologiczne Studia Doktoranckie  
Uniwersytet Gdańskie  
Wita Stwosza 51  
80-308 Gdańsk  
Poland  
[jstiepanow@gmail.com](mailto:jstiepanow@gmail.com)

CULTURE



**At the interplace:  
*Giant*, Tino Villanueva  
and America's promise of diversity**

GRZEGORZ WELIZAROWICZ

*Received 3.05.2017,  
accepted 9.11.2017.*

**Abstract**

The two founding conceptions of the “sublime” are Burke’s and Kant’s. Drawing from Casey (and Buber), the article introduces a third concept of the “interplace”, an in-between, relational space of mutuality. Building on this notion, it is argued that Tino Villanueva’s collection *Scene from the Movie GIANT*, written in response to the climactic scene of the film *Giant*, enacts an intervention into the scene’s interpellating force and, in so doing, doubly embodies the interplace. Further, it is argued that the film’s two scenes stage allegorically an interplace of the white American patriarchy’s dilemmas of the 1950s. The scenes problematize America’s ability to change and follow through on the promise of reconciliation in diversity. The last section of the paper reviews a number of paradigmatic challenges America has been rehearsing in the past decades and argues that the current backlash against the transformative agenda constitutes a disappointment of the hopes expressed by *Giant* and Villanueva. The divisive rhetoric of today represents a retreat from the interplace of dialog.

**Keywords**

diversity, *Giant*, interplace, racism, sublime, Tino Villanueva

**Interplace (pomiędzy):  
*Giant*, Tino Villanueva  
i amerykańska obietnica różnorodności**

**Abstrakt**

Dwie założycielskie koncepcje pojęcia “sublime” pochodzą od Burke'a i Kanta. Czerpiąc z propozycji Casey'a (i Bubera), artykuł wprowadza trzecią koncepcję *interplace* jako przestrzeni dialogu w miejscu „pomiędzy”. Pojęcie to zastosowane jest do analizy zbioru poetyckiego *Scene from the Movie GIANT* Tino Villanuevy, który powstał w odpowiedzi na kulminacyjną scenę filmu *Gigant*. W dalszej części artykułu dowodzi, że dwie sceny filmu można traktować jako alegoryczne przedstawienie *interplace* dylematów białego amerykańskiego patriarchatu w latach 50. XX wieku. Sceny te problematyzują zdolność Ameryki do zmiany i pojednania w różnorodności. W ostatniej części zarysowane są wyzwania paradygmatyczne, z jakimi zmagała się Ameryka w ostatnich dekadach, a zwrot ku konserwatyzmowi zinterpretowany jest jako zawiedzenie nadziei *Giganta* i Villanuevy. Rozłamowa retoryka współczesności stanowi ucieczkę od dialogicznego *interplace*.

**Słowa kluczowe**

*Giant*, *interplace*, rasizm, różnorodność, Tino Villanueva, wzniosłość

Discussing landscape representation, Edward Casey reviews the definitions of the sublime proposed by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. He reminds us that, for Burke, the natural outside, especially in its dimensions of height and depth, is “the literal [bearer] of the sublime” (Casey 2002: 48). For Kant, on the other hand, the sublimity “stems from within” (Casey 2002: 48), from our rational ideation. As Kant says, the outside, extravagant natural phenomena only “lend” themselves “to the presentation of a sublimity discoverable in the mind” (Casey 2002: 48); nature only “excites” the sublime as an idea *in us* (Casey 2002: 52). Kant believes that it is by an act of

“subreption” (Casey 2002: 49) or self-deception that we attribute sublimity to nature “in place of [respect] for the idea of humanity in our own self – the Subject” (Casey 2002: 49). In other words, for Burke the sublime resides in a “physical site of *rerum natura*” whereas for Kant, it is located in a “psychical place, a *locus mentis*” (Casey 2002: 50).

Casey argues that both conceptions – Kant’s idea of our mental “pre-eminence above nature” (Casey 2002: 54) and Burke’s emphasis on the “omnipotence of nature” (Casey 2002: 54) – are locked in the either/or dualism and miss “a deeper accord wherein the sublime is rooted” (Casey 2002: 54). The accord he refers to is the “coeval commixture” (Casey 2002: 54) of mind and nature which is founded on “their mutual interaction, their intense interplay” (Casey 2002: 54) in the circumambience of the places of landscape. Casey explains that in the experience of nature, I do not only take in or sublimate a given physical scene so that it becomes my psychic space or “psychotopia” (Casey 2002: 51), but I also perform a “mental movement” (Casey 2002: 54) into nature; a movement in the form of ideas (including socially and culturally inflected ideas, i.e.: the ideas of the sublime) as well as “phantasms that cannot be reduced to merely reproductive icons” (Casey 2002: 54).<sup>1</sup> In doing so, I endow nature with meaning which exceeds the perceived scene just as the “natural world exceeds what reason and imagination construct independently of it” (Casey 2002: 54). Therefore “[t]rue sublimity”, Casey (2002: 54) concludes, is relational and happens across differences; like “the image or phantasm that conveys it [...] it must exist somewhere between mind and nature” (my emphasis). In other words, Casey argues, the encounter with landscape occurs neither out there in the spectacular outside nor internally in me but always at the “interplace”, at that “place between places” (2002: 348). Martin Buber’s arguments about the relation-

---

<sup>1</sup> Casey, drawing on Aristotle, points out that a “phantasm [...] has a perceptible form *common to* sensuous appearances and to the mind that apprehends them and is not based on likeness in the manner of strictly iconic images” (2002: 54).

ality of experience and about encounter as a “revelation” can help explain the interplace further. Buber holds that, in the words of Michael Zank, “no isolated I exists apart from relationship to an other”, “individuated elements realize themselves in relations, forming patterns that burst into life, grow, vanish, and revive” (Zank 2002). Those relations, which Buber calls “I-Thou”, are polymorphous and inter-subjective, and transform “each figure into an ultimate and mysterious center of value” (Zank 2002). To realize such a transformation is to experience the encounter as a moment of revelation of “presence” (*Gegenwart*): “In contrast to ‘object’ (*Gegenstand*), the presence revealed by revelation as encounter occupies the space ‘in between’ the subject and an other (a tree, a person, a work of art, God). This ‘in between’ space is defined as ‘mutual’ (*gegenseitig*)” (Zank 2002). As an example of this theory of mutuality consider Buber’s story “The Walking Stick and the Tree”:<sup>2</sup> “I pressed my walking stick against a trunk of an oak tree. Then I felt in twofold fashion my contact with being: here, where I held the stick, and there, where it touched the bark. Apparently only where I was, I nonetheless found myself there too where I found the tree” (2002 [1967]: 49). For Buber, the stick symbolizes the space of dialog. He explains that as he extends himself with the stick he “means”, intends, and calls the Other into being. At the same time, he also “delegate[s]” himself to the Other in “pure vibration” which “remains there” (2002 [1967]: 50). Buber concludes: “I encompass him to whom I turn” (2002 [1967]: 50). But, to build on this, it can also be argued that the Other is not purely subject to the encompassment by my agency. It responds to the stick’s pressure, it reciprocates with its own vibration and, in turn, delegates itself to me. Thus, the stick is a conductor; it symbolizes the arena of mutuality. The interplace is, thus, a channel, always in flux. The challenge to landscape representation would be then not to render a topographic verisimilitude but to cap-

---

<sup>2</sup> I want to thank Professor Katarzyna Jerzak for indicating to me the parallel between the concept of the interplace and Buber’s theory.

ture that moment of flux, of “presence” or *accord of mind and nature*, or, as Casey says, to concretize “the topopoetry” which, he aptly notes, “is at stake in all artistic representation” (2002: 55).

The notion of the interplace, thus, names a liminal zone of the encounter between ontologies. In this way, the interplace provides a useful model for thinking of art, not only of landscape art, as well as of other forms of doing/experience as the space of imbrication between the personal and the Other.

Chicano poet Tino Villanueva’s collection *Scene from the Movie GIANT* (1993) can arguably be taken to embody the notion of the interplace albeit in a different context. Here, the lyrical Eye revisits a moment from his adolescence when, at fourteen, he sat at a San Marcos, TX movie theater and watched *Giant*, a 1956 blockbuster set in Texas, adapted from Edna Ferber’s novel of the same name. Directed by George Stevens, the film’s stars were, among others, Rock Hudson as Bick Benedict, a patriarch Texan rancher, and Elisabeth Taylor as his Yankee wife Leslie Lynnton.<sup>3</sup> In the movie’s climactic scene, Benedict clashes with Sarge, the owner of a roadside diner, who refuses to serve a Mexican family. The Benedicts’ son Jordy has recently married Juana, a Mexican woman, and Bick, whose hitherto world-view and labor practices accepted segregation as the norm, is now coming to terms with having a mixed-race grandson, Jordan IV. When Sarge, a giant of a man, attempts to eject the Mexican patrons by saying “Your money is no good here”, Bick intervenes. He first pleads with Sarge but when the latter scoffs at the idea of letting Mexicans eat at his place, the two white men break into a fist-fight.

Villanueva builds the whole collection around that scene and his adolescent experience of it, when in the mute and feeble Mexican characters he recognized himself and his family – an experience which rendered him equally helpless, “caught”

---

<sup>3</sup> The film is also remembered as the last work of James Dean as Jett Rink. Released posthumously, it earned Dean a nomination for the Best Actor Academy Award in 1957.

and “locked into a back-row seat [...] thin, flickering / [...] unthought-of” (1993: 2).

The collection can be taken to record at least two interplaces. The first is the child’s paralysis in the face of the alienating insult of the screen, the numbness effected by an outside force and thus comparable to the Burkean sublime or to Schopenhauer’s definition of the term as a “sight of a power beyond all comparison, superior to the individual, and threatening him with annihilation” (Sandywell 2011: 559). The only difference is that this emotion is caused not by a “terrifying” natural horizon; this is the American sublime of segregation and racist representations which, like any sublime, “escapes the everyday forms of language” (Sandywell 2011: 559). The interplace the teenage Villanueva experiences, the revelation or presence of the Other, is beyond his powers of comprehension; the weight of the film’s images, the “weightless nobodies” of the Mexican characters, “[a] no-thing, who could have been any of us” (1993: 24), crushes his youthful subjectivity. Thus, left “[w]ithout words, the child / [begins] to feel mortal, his mind breaking into awfulness” (1993: 20). He loses breath and voice, falls into “stammer” (1993: 9); his self disintegrates (1993: 17): “something begins to go from you [...] to / Wither on the floor” (1993: 19). His future, “the way to dream / Outside myself” (1993: 17), that Buberian dream of encounter in revelation (*Gegenwart*) and mutuality (*gegenseitig*), now seems prematurely foreclosed as he realizes that “Sarge, or someone / Like him, can banish you from this / Hamburger joint; from the rest of your / Life not yet entered; from this Holiday Theater and all sense of place” (1993: 18). The screen’s images consume him: “From inside, a small / Fire began to burn like deep doubt” (1993: 17) and his “soul, deep is offended” (1993: 19). An unfathomable “fallingrief of unpleasure” overcomes him, causing an overpowering, benumbed confusion: “You want to go mad or die, but turn morose instead” (1993: 19). The child sinks into insignificance: you “wish you / Could dissolve yourself [...] fade to black” (1993: 19). Thus, the young

viewer becomes a mere shadow, a “penumbra” (1993: 31), whose voice is “a great shout which never came”, reduced to “dumb misery” (1993: 32), a see-through existence of “muteness”, “emptied of meaning” (1993: 33), subject to consuming “nothingness burning through all thought” (1993: 34).

If this first interplace of the movie theater experience is the space of defeat which leaves the boy walking in “soft-hollowed steps” (1993: 33) to the Mexican neighborhood’s “border / feeling I was nothing” (1993: 34), the collection as a whole enacts a mental movement into the scene, that is, it offers itself as another interplace in which the subjectivity of the now mature poet enters into reciprocity of coeval commixture with the film. The adult poet’s experience, imagination and socio-cultural-linguistic expertise allow him now, years after the cinema’s trauma, to reclaim voice and agency. Villanueva, clearly mirroring Hamlet’s design and Shakespearean line, proclaims: “*the / poem’s the thing wherein I’ll etch the semblance / of the film*” (1993: 39).<sup>4</sup> Villanueva says: “what *I took in* that afternoon took root and a / quiet vehemence arose. It arose in language / [...] / Now I am because I write” (1993: 40; my emphasis). In other words, he has sublimated the scene to the point that now he is able to re-assume the presence or *Gegenwart*, to seek talking back to it at that place of mutuality or *gegenseitig*. With the retelling of the experience, Villanueva writes himself, his younger self, and the Mexican characters of the screen back into existence, into “being human / (when the teller is the tale being told)” (1993: 42). Thus, for example, in “Text for a *Vaquero*: Flashback” he appends to the film the history and the “youthful air” (1993: 11) dreams of the Old Man Polo, the film’s nameless Mexican man whom Sarge grabs in “the false hell of the hamburger place” (1993: 12). In this sense, Villanueva attempts to decenter the giant of the film’s racist sublime. To this end, to destroy the

---

<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare has Hamlet say the last line of Act II this way: “The play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king.” I want to thank Professor Jean Ward for pointing this out to me.

border instituted by the Technicolor screen which initially immobilized him, he appropriates, as Ann Marie Stock observes, the cinematic discourse ("Scene", "Flashback", "Stop-Action", "Fade-Out-Fade-In") and film techniques (frame-by-frame recollection, asynchronous sound). In the finale his voice transforms: he pollutes and hybridizes the hitherto dominant English language by introducing Spanish syntax and words, and, ultimately, in the last lines, he switches to Spanish altogether: "*O vida vivida y por venir* [Oh life lived and this to come]" (1993: 42). These are his final words, now that he has reclaimed his past and, in so doing, regained control over his destiny.

In other words, the collection's two interplaces problematize Kant's depersonalized, unmarked claims about our ideational powers. Villanueva's collection clearly exposes the fiction of the universal thinking subject and indicates that each subject is *marked* with nuances of age, as well as ethnic and linguistic background. In the first instance, the young protagonist does not simply fall for subreption but rather is genuinely overwhelmed by the sublime of the scene just as he desperately attempts to resist it, as if gasping for air. The problem is that he is innocent and trapped in his seat with no Buberian stick at hand, no words or ideas in him. The interplace between him and the film is the site of alienation, distress, loss, incomprehension, fragmentation. It is only as a mature poet that Villanueva will ask: "Can two fighters / bring out a third?" (1993: 27-28); only then will he become this third force and create what Stock has called a "revisionist cine-poetry", a polymorphous, inter-subjective form to retroactively resist the scene's spell, to move into it or, as Buber says, to "encompass" it and transform it on his own terms.

If Villanueva concentrates on the scene's alienating effect on his own self and his larger Mexican American community, there is also another, more general, way to think of the fight scene at Sarge's Place. I mentioned that Benedict is moved to react because he himself, now having a Mexican daughter-in-

law and a half-Mexican grandson, is transitioning across the border of his own preconceptions, from a strict segregationist to a more inclusive position. If that transition is reluctant at first, Sarge's rude behavior toward the Mexican patrons forces him to assume agency, to intervene into what previously would have been for his earlier self a "natural", normalized fact of Texas life. However, it seems that Benedict is thrust into the interplace to meet the racist sublime of patriarchal white America not because he genuinely cares about those Others but because his own honor – his brown grandson sitting next to him – is offended. In other words, as the film offers the scene as a response to the *Zeitgeist*, to issues of racial dictatorship America was no longer able to ignore in the mid-1950s, it also signals that it is the white conscience that is in question and the scene is basically an allegory of a feud in the house of white patriarchy. The accompaniment of "The Yellow Rose of Texas", Mitch Miller's 1955 hit version of an old minstrel song and a Confederate anthem, stands for the resiliency of the *ancien régime*. And the sign, "WE RESERVE THE RIGHT TO REFUSE SERVICE TO ANYONE", which Sarge drops at the fallen Bick's chest, represents the legal framework (notice the frame of the sign) which underpins the cultural practices of segregation or, as Villanueva says, the "writ" which "legitimizes his [Sarge's] fists" (1993: 28).

Thus, two giants confront each other. Villanueva says: "they have become two minds / Settling a border dispute" (1993: 26). But I am tempted to think that Bick is fighting here his own, larger *alter-ego*. The giant we and the young Villanueva root for is big but still less imposing than the villain; Sarge, that more gigantic giant, "with too much muscle" (Villanueva 1993: 27) is literally undefeatable. A "wollop [...] up-vaults [Benedict] over the counter, / As over a line in a house divided at heart" writes Villanueva (1993: 27). Bick's defeat is a moral victory but also sends a foreboding message: the fight for equality has to take place within the White Man's mind. It will be vicious, dangerous, bloody, and will involve challenging the

whole cultural and legal apparatus, for Sarge, for now, stands victorious “in glory like a / Law that stands for other laws” (Villanueva 1993: 28).

That the titular Giant is in fact the White Man’s conscience is confirmed by the film’s finale. Bick recuperates with Leslie by his side, while their two grandsons, one blond, blue-eyed and the other brown, stand and watch them from a playpen nearby. Bick laments that his life has been a failure, to which Leslie replies: “I think you’re great. [...] all that glamour stuff you used to do to dazzle me [...] none of it ever made you quite as big a man to me as you were on the floor of Sarge’s hamburger joint. When you tumbled rearward and landed crashing into that pile of dirty dishes you were at last my hero”. The camera transitions to the playpen. Behind the cousins stand a white lamb and a black calf corresponding to their respective colors. A close up on the blue eyes; cut to a close up on the brown face. The end.

The notion of the interplace helps us to understand the scene not quite literally. The last words belong to Bick and so, it can be argued, do the film’s last frames. It is not we, the viewers, who are looking at the toddlers, but rather what we see is the movement of Benedict, the white hero, into the scene of his family’s diversity. The finale enacts Bick’s entrance into the interplace between him and his grandsons. It signals both hope and reservations, as well as potential compromise. How if not as an allegory of doubt should we read the presence of two different species behind the children? The lamb, a symbol of “purity, innocence, meekness” (Cirlot 2001 [1971]: 176), stands behind the white boy. The black calf which hides behind Jordan IV is a future bull and may evoke very different connotations – fecundity, penetration, and death (Cirlot 2001 [1971]: 3-34). And, if the image is allegorical, what about the bars of the playpen’s fence? Does it stand for a border barring Otherness – children’s innocence as well as racial difference – from the patriarch’s nomos?

The film, thus, ends with uneasy questions about the future of racial relations in America. On the one hand, it indicates that the American family has changed and will inevitably hybridize. The image of two innocent children carries on the surface a promise of harmonious co-existence. And yet, at the same time, in its suggestive symbolism, the frames ponder the Giant's, the White Patriarchal Order's, genuine intention to afford them equal opportunity, to instill in them the moral code of plurality in difference. Is diversity's promise going to be compromised as the cousins grow? What education will the Giant afford them? The interplace of Bick's gaze poses a challenge to America's Giant: as it appeals to *His* conscience it also asks about *His* will to change, to deserve Leslie's definition of a hero who dazzles not with "fine riding and all that fancy roping, all that glamor stuff" but who, even if it takes winding up on the floor "in the middle of a salad", will be able to defend the principles of the New American Family and, in so doing, become, as Leslie says elatedly of the Benedicts, a "real big success!"

The years that followed the film's premiere illustrated how hard the challenge was; that, even though reforms would come, none of them came easy and none could ever be taken for granted. These reforms were pushed for and sacrificed for mostly by minorities, but it took important allies from among the ranks of the Giant to accomplish them. Many wanted to believe that the Giant embraced *His* better self. After all, even if progress towards them was managerial and not without flaws, diversity and multiculturalism became, or so we thought, the new norm in American official discourse; the metaphors which helped America navigate the post-Civil Rights years and provided important moral leverage for U.S diplomacy.

As the demographics changed and minorities acquired a measure of visibility, many optimistically believed that the United States had finally internationalized and was on course to becoming, in Ishmael Reed's proclamation, "the first univer-

sal nation” (Gray 2011: 528), which, by accepting a diversity of epistemologies, would create a “new, inclusive [...] common culture” (Reed 1998: xxvi). In 1989 Chicano performance artist/writer, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, diagnosed that the U.S. was undergoing “borderization”: “Today, if there is a dominant culture, it is border culture” (Gómez-Peña 1993: 46). “The border is all we share / *La frontera es lo único que compartimos*” (Gómez-Peña 1993: 47), he wrote. In 1996 he announced the arrival of the “New World Border – a great trans- and intercontinental border zone, a place in which no centers remain”, where “hybridity is the dominant culture” (1996: 7), and the dominant sensibility is that of an exile. Border-crossings, he said, have become an everyday practice which, although posing new challenges and demanding skills in intercultural dialog, would inevitably lead to a “gringostroika”, a transculturation of the dominant cultural paradigms of the U.S.

This optimistic anticipation of the *perestroika* of the Giant reverberated in the arts and scholarly debates of the time. In Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* (1993), the prophet of the model New American Family is a gay AIDS survivor. In *Multi-America* (1998), Robert Elliot Fox, of Polish Catholic ancestry, proposes that “*Mestizaje*, Creolization – is the future [...] [and] America never was ‘white’” (1998: 15). Lamenting the resiliency of normative whiteness, Fox demands a shift of consciousness to post-whiteness: “[W]hiteness must reproduce itself with each generation”, but that is precisely why, he says, “one can refuse to reproduce it. I can’t become black, but I can become post-white” (1998: 12) for, “[p]ost-white means pan-human” (1998: 11). American Studies scholars reflected similar concerns by proposing that their field should now be viewed as “part of a complex, transnational dialogue that breaks down [...] notions of exceptionalism and essentialism by drawing on disjunctions and similarities between cultures, challenging mythic unity with diversity and critique” (Campbell and Kean 2006 [1997]: 17). This “transnational turn” sought to redefine American identity paradigms by alternative models of belong-

ing, not restricted by race, nationhood, or bounded national territory. It sought to “relativise” and “re-examine the idea of nation and its romantic attachment to roots and essential, fixed identity, and supplement it with a sense of ‘routes’” (Campbell and Kean 2006 [1997]: 17-18). Janice Radway’s American Studies Association presidential address “What’s in the Name?” (1998), in which she invited a reconceptualization of the field in terms of, for example, postnationality, postcoloniality and hemispheric orientation, is but one illustration of such paradigm shifts (Pease 2010: 263-283).

Of course, such debates met dogged opposition. Pat Buchanan, who twice sought Republican presidential nomination in the 1990s, exhorted whites to “take back our country”, suggesting that it has already been lost, to multiculturalists, perhaps” (Williams 1998: 463). The slogan resurfaced in the Tea Party movement. Realizing the challenges ahead, John A. Williams, another contributor to *Multi-America*, argued that multiculturalism was the country’s “last best hope” (1998: 465).

The two cousins from *Giant* have now lived for sixty plus years. Their time has been marked by the interplace from the beginning. But at what point in their lives did the fence that initially barred them from their grandpa turn into a wall between them? When did they look at each other with a stranger’s eyes? When was the first time that Jordy fell mute with the incomprehensibility of a racial insult? What did his cousin, the blue-eyed heir of the Giant, do about it? Did the cousins stick together “exercising intracommunal support in all things” (Williams 1998: 465), knowing that “[w]e live therefore we cross” (Gómez-Peña 1996: 138)? Or did the American sublime, that interpellating, “immovable force” (Williams 1998: 462) of racism destroy them?

On June 16, 2015, Donald Trump announced his run for the Republican nomination by erecting an imaginary wall at the heart of this American family: “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. [...] They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists”. In a later inter-

view he hungered for a nativist security state: “You have people come in [...] from all over, that are killers and rapists and they’re coming to this country” (Scott 2015). His slogan “Make America Great Again” was a thinly veiled reprise of Buchanan’s call and what Bill Clinton rightly diagnosed as “a racist dog whistle to white Southerners” (Chasmar 2016). Trump’s win and continuing praise from his base is an indicator of the Giant’s fatigue with social and symbolic transformations. It is, to use Williams, a “backhanded slap of white Americans” (1998: 465) meted out to little Jordy, his mature self of today, Villanueva, and their extended families. It is also a slap in Leslie’s face to the promise she sees in her husband’s “glorious” fight, the promise of the American Giant’s ability to transform. Leslie’s optimism about the moral redemption of the American family clashes today against the surge of what Williams identifies as “the practice and theory that every society possess a collective goat to blame when things are going badly”. The figure of the terrifying Other (Mexican, Muslim, immigrant) seems to be ever in demand in America. Perhaps this is so because in a truly egalitarian society the key assumptions of whiteness would have to be addressed and the collective scapegoats would be “difficult to discern” (Williams 1998: 463) one from another. This scares Trump and his constituents.

The figure of the terrifying Other from Trump’s program can be compared to the idea of the Burkean sublime. The figure of a border wall, on the other hand, mobilizes an imaginary of resistance not unlike that which Kant calls “*Wiederstein*” or our capacity to realize “a dominion which reason exercises over sensibility” (Kant in Casey 2002: 48). If, learning from Ferber, Stevens, Villanueva, Bick, Leslie, Old Man Polo and others, the mid-twentieth century America dared to begin to dream of the social space as a dialogic interplace, the conservative agenda culminating in the Trump-era abandons the encounter, slides back into the either/or trenches and, in so doing, disappoints Leslie’s prophecy of the familial “real big success!”, bracketing it as a sheer fantasy.

This retreat does not make America “Great”. It reduces it to a bully in a playpen who, once he tastes the fruits of undeserved privilege, turns cruelly against his closest cousin. If genealogically *Giant* stands as the prophecy of white America’s ability to change, Trump America’s impulses may be read as an attempt to intervene in the message of the classic film, to forestall the moral validation of the Giant’s transformation in the last scenes. This America longs to turn back the clock to return to the sublime interplace of Sarge’s Place and restage the film’s resolution. It asks: what if it was the law and order of Sarge and not our empathy in a “house divided at heart” that dictated morals? A “wollop [...] up-vaults” Bick. Zoom in on the cold “writ”:

WE RESERVE  
THE RIGHT  
TO REFUSE SERVICE  
TO ANYONE

## References

- Buber, Martin (2002 [1967]). *Meetings: Autobiographical Fragments*. New York: Routledge.
- Campbell, Neil; Kean, Alasdair (2006 [1997]). *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*. London – New York: Routledge.
- Casey, Edward (2002). *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps*. Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Chasmar, Jessica (2016). “Bill Clinton vowed to ‘make America great again’ in 1992, now says slogan is racist”. *The Washington Times*. September 9. Available at <<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/sep/9/bill-clinton-vowed-to-make-america-great-again-in-/>>. Accessed 19 April 2017.
- Cirlot, J. E. (2001 [1971]). *A Dictionary of Symbols*. Second Edition. Trans. Jack Sage. London: Routledge.

- Fox, Robert Elliot (1998). "Becoming post-white". In: Ishmael Reed (ed.). *Multi-America: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace*. New York: Penguin, 6-17.
- Gómez-Peña, Guillermo (1993). *Warrior for Gringostroika: Essays, Performance Texts, and Poetry*. Saint Paul: Graywolf Press.
- Gómez-Peña, Guillermo (1996). *The New World Border: Prophesies, Poems and Loqueras for the End of the Century*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Gray, Richard (2011). *A History of American Literature*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Pease, Donald (2010). "Postnational and postcolonial reconfigurations of American Studies in the postmodern condition". In: John Carlos Rowe (ed.). *A Concise Companion to American Studies*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 263-283.
- Reed, Ishmael (1998). "Introduction". In: Ishmael Reed (ed.). *Multi-America: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace*. New York: Penguin, xv-xxviii.
- Sandywell, Barry (2011). *Dictionary of Visual Discourse: A Dialectical Lexicon of Terms*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Scott, Eugene (2015). "Candidate Donald Trump Talks Immigration, Gay marriage and ISIS". CNN. June 28. Available at <<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/06/28/politics/donald-trump-immigration-gay-marriage-2016/>>. Accessed 20 April 2017.
- Stock, Ann Marie (1998). "Talking back, looking ahead: The revisionist cine-poetry of Tino Villanueva". *Bilingual Review / Revista Bilingüe* 23/3: 237-247. Available at <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25745629>>. Accessed 19 February 2017.
- Villanueva, Tino (1993). *Scene from the Movie GIANT*. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press.
- Williams, John A (1998). "One More Time". In: Ishmael Reed (ed.). *Multi-America: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace*. New York: Penguin, 462-465.
- Zank, Michael. "Martin Buber". *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buber/#DialTho>>. Accessed 19 April 2017.

Grzegorz Welizarowicz  
Instytut Anglistyki i Amerykanistyki  
Uniwersytet Gdańskie  
Wita Stwosza 51  
80-308 Gdańsk  
Poland  
[grzegorz.welizarowicz@ug.edu.pl](mailto:grzegorz.welizarowicz@ug.edu.pl)



## **REPORTS**



**DRAFF conference (5–6 August 2016)  
and Samuel Beckett Summer School  
(7–12 August 2016), Trinity College Dublin**

ALEKSANDRA WACHACZ

*Received 14.11.2017,  
accepted 30.11.2017.*

Between 5 and 6 August 2016, Trinity College Dublin hosted the first DRAFF conference devoted to Samuel Beckett. On the first day four panels explored Beckett's fundamental sounds, poetry, correspondence and politics. The day finished with a keynote speaker presentation. Dirk van Hulle from the University of Antwerp discussed the value of passages that Beckett deleted from his manuscripts. Van Hulle made a brilliant parallel between the phenomenon of *pentimenti* in painting and Beckett's writing. *Pentimenti* is "repainting", in Beckett's case we can talk of "rewriting". Van Hulle stressed that the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project helps to trace all variety of versions of his texts. The second day of the conference tackled issues of perception, translation and language. In the second panel, Aleksandra Wachacz and Bartosz Lutostański from the University of Gdańsk discussed Beckett translations by Antoni Libera, especially *Waiting for Godot* and *Company*. They pointed out several inconsistencies in Libera's translations and tried to assess their value as "perfected" translations (a term used by Libera). Mark Nixon from the University of Reading, the keynote speaker on the second day, presented his work on editing Beckett's *German Diaries*, which most probably will be

published in late 2017. He noted that not only are the *German Diaries* a text by Beckett but most importantly they are a “pan-opticum of German society of the time”.

The conference finished with a concert supported by the German Embassy in Dublin. The string quartet Ensemble Ficino performed works by Ludwig van Beethoven and Franz Schubert, both often mentioned in Beckett’s works.

The afternoon of 7 August saw an event shared by the conference and the Samuel Beckett Summer School. For the first time, a selection of Beckett’s poems was read in French, English and Irish; the texts were shown on a screen. The reading was given by Mouth on Fire, an Ireland-based theatre company. The same poems read in three different languages called up three different emotional dimensions. Even though most of the audience did not know a word of Irish, the whole concept was applauded and welcomed very enthusiastically.

Each day of the following week commenced with a lecture which was followed by an afternoon seminar of choice: “Beckett’s Manuscripts” conducted by Mark Nixon and Dirk Van Hulle, “Bilingual Beckett” by Nadia Louar, “Beckett and Music” by Catherine Laws and the “Samuel Beckett Laboratory” run by Nick Johnson and Jonathan Heron. In the evenings, a variety of social and artistic events brought together the participants of the Summer School. Some were open to the public.

Day 1: The Samuel Beckett Summer School opened with a lecture by Rónan McDonald on “Valuing Beckett”. McDonald claimed that it is difficult to talk about the value of literature in general, but especially about Beckett’s value. Among reasons for this is Beckett’s status as cultural capital. Moreover, Beckett’s writing is anchored in his biography. From the reader’s perspective, we have no language to answer the question “what is that thing in Beckett that we value, that we like?” The second lecture by Angela Moorjani was entitled “Beckett’s Containers or What the Archive Tells Us About Beckett and Buddhism”. This lecture was particularly interesting as Moorjani argued that the latest advances in Beckett studies enable us to

establish a connection between Beckett and Buddhism through Schopenhauer, whom Beckett read avidly. Although Beckett was not interested in this strand of oriental philosophy, there are similarities between his and Schopenhauer's views on compassion, for example, which, in the case of the latter, result from a strong interest in Buddhism and thorough studies of ancient treatises.

The discussion continued in less formal circles in the evening. A welcome reception in Trinity Library was an occasion to meet and exchange ideas.

Day 2: Matthew Feldman opened the second day with his lecture on "...suggesting pursuit of knowledge at some period' On Preparing Samuel Beckett's Philosophy Notes for Publication". He gave an outline of the main philosophers read by Beckett. A variety of different thinkers and thoughts find reflection in Beckett's notes, which apparently lack the last few pages. Nevertheless, Feldman attempted to estimate whether the notes constitute any kind of "whole" and what story the notes tell. David Pattie followed this fascinating set of considerations with his "Other Archives" lecture in which he presented two types of looking at (any) archive: *centripetal* and *centrifugal*. A centripetal archive is about reading inwards. It presents material that leads us back to the artist, illuminates working practices and echoes the narrative constructed around the artist. On the other hand, a centrifugal archive reads outwards, from the artist, out to the wider world. This kind of material mediates between the artist and other artists. Feldman claims that in this case "material is stuff" which moves us towards interaction with the outer world. At this point, "stuff" can be defined as "everyday material, accessible to the subject's senses and produced also by aesthetic practice".

The evening event was open to the public. Barry McGovern, an actor who has performed Beckett texts many times, read excerpts from, among others, *Mercier and Camier* in the newly renovated premises of the General Post Office in Dublin.

Day 3: Before the field trip around Beckett country, only one lecture took place. Catherine Laws spoke about “‘Headaches among the Overtones’. Music in the Work of Samuel Beckett”. Firstly, Laws reviewed the presence of music in Beckett’s works. She argued that music is either a theme or provides a refuge from words (for example *Ghost Trio* with Beethoven or humming and singing Schubert in *Nacht und Traüme*). Then Laws distinguished the musicality of Beckett’s works as a different phenomenon. She mentioned several traits of “Not I” as an example: structure, refrain, anapaest rhythm, echoes or half-sounds. This part of Law’s presentation met with some sceptical responses, as it was felt it was not sufficiently documented. In the last part, Laws discussed other composers’ responses to Beckett.

After the field trip, there was an opportunity to test one’s knowledge about Samuel Beckett in a Beckett Pub Quiz. Four teams supported by experts confronted several rounds of 10 questions about Beckett’s biography, prose and theatre work, quotations, images and miscellaneous related topics.

Day 4: Lecture number six was delivered by Nadia Louar: “Encore le corps...body remains in the *Trilogy*”. Louar explored several linguistic questions related to body memory and topography as well as some ideas close to geopoetics. She claimed that in *Molloy* the geography of the limits of the human body is particularly striking and argued that “bodies don’t tell the stories anymore, the stories map themselves in geography”. The lecture was followed by a roundtable about Beckett and politics and political Beckett. The main issue raised during the discussion questioned the use of academic research in relation to performative studies and the application of such a “theoretical” approach to a practitioner’s work. Nevertheless, it turned out that Beckett’s work nowadays is surrounded by politics: whether it involves the Beckett Estate declining to authorise a production, censorship, or LGBT circles using Beckett for non-artistic (?) purposes, the question should not be about how he is political, but rather what we can do about it.

Some answers and even more pending questions related to a discussion about Beckett's politics emerged during an evening meeting (open to the public) with Olwen Fouéré, an Irish artist who has recently toured with several Beckett productions.

Day 5: The last day of the Summer School was devoted to seminar presentations and Laboratory Showcase. The performance seminar focused on sound in theatre in general and in Beckett's work in particular. The group agreed that if we pay special attention to a text, there is no silence, as even when no words are spoken there is always the human noise of the public. Another proof for the absence of perfect silence can be found in the anechoic chamber, perfectly isolated from the outside world. When one enters such a chamber, one can hear one's own heartbeat as well as blood circulating in the body. Despite the lack of any outer sound, the body itself produces a range of noises. The seminar participants explored various ways of producing sounds with their bodies and the ordinary objects surrounding them. The theatrical installation presented that day encouraged other participants of the summer school to explore sounds, listen to phrases chosen from Beckett's work and experience the sense of teamwork developed during the week.

A farewell banquet was the last event which gathered together Summer School participants, professors and artists. Some of them will come back next year to learn, share ideas and socialise with other Samuel Beckett enthusiasts.

Aleksandra Wachacz  
Filologiczne Studia Doktoranckie  
Uniwersytet Gdańskie  
Wita Stwosza 51  
80-308 Gdańsk  
Poland  
[Aleksandra.wachacz@gmail.com](mailto:Aleksandra.wachacz@gmail.com)



## **Information for Contributors**

*Beyond Philology* is an international journal of linguistics, literary studies and language acquisition. The journal publishes articles, reviews, reports and interviews. The language of the journal is English.

The preferred length of papers is 3500 words, but slightly shorter and longer manuscripts are also considered for publication. Manuscripts should be accompanied by abstracts of about 150 words and keywords.

Each contributor should send a note stating specifically that his/her manuscript is only being considered for publication in *Beyond Philology*.

Manuscripts (papers, book reviews, reports, interviews) and books submitted for review should be sent to:

Beyond Philology  
Institute of English and American Studies  
University of Gdańsk  
Wita Stwosza 51  
80-308 Gdańsk  
Poland  
Email: beyond.philology@ug.edu.pl

For more information see:

<[http://www.fil.ug.gda.pl/pl/instytutu--anglistyki\\_i\\_amerykanistyki--beyond\\_philology/](http://www.fil.ug.gda.pl/pl/instytutu--anglistyki_i_amerykanistyki--beyond_philology/)>

All correspondence concerning subscriptions should be sent to:

Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego  
Armii Krajowej 119/121  
80-824 Sopot, Poland  
Phone/fax: (48) 58 523 11 37  
<http://www.wyd.univ.gda.pl>  
Email: wyd@ug.gda.pl